SCIENCE FICTION eye

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SPECIAL FICTION ISSUE

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL R. DELANY

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DISPATCHES FROM
THE ADVERTISING FRONT
By Steve Brown

I've been putting up with the Scientologists for all these years, but this time they've gone too far. This "religion" has made a public nuisance for itself for the past twenty-five years. But, although spawned from SF, until now they've pretty much left SF alone.

When they began getting into the SF field in a big way, a few years ago, the Scientologists threw loads of money around. They gave lavish parties at conventions, culminating in their controversial high visibility at the Brighton Worldcon. They started up the Writers of the Future program (and soon: Artists of the Future) and began training young SF writers. The training techniques they used came from forty year old articles on pulp writing by L. Ron Hubbard. And, their big weapon, they threw money at the project.

Writers of the Future has remained controversial. Several significant writers, such as Robert Silverberg and the late Terry Carr, have taken their money, and been vilified for it. The Scientologists' most significant purchase has been that of Algis Budrys, one of the field's finest writers and critics, who is now, sadly, seen as predominantly a PR flack for Hubbard.

Now, all that is disturbing, but I put up with it.

However, now they've gone too far.

The Scientologists' publisher, Bridge Publications, has just finished publishing the ten volume L. Ron Hubbard novel known (collectively) as *Mission Earth*. They created a promotion campaign such as the publishing world had never seen, spending vast sums on advertising. Reports began appearing of rank and file Scientologists given quotas of books to be sold, which were often purchased in bulk and warehoused. These efforts were concentrated on the big chain book stores, such as Waldenbooks and B. Dalton, ensuring a heavy report to the *New York Times* Bestseller list--perhaps *the* major measure of commercial success in American publishing. It worked. Several of the volumes actually did spend a week or so each in the lower to middle echelons of that list. The Scientologists lost no time in trumpeting this in their advertising:

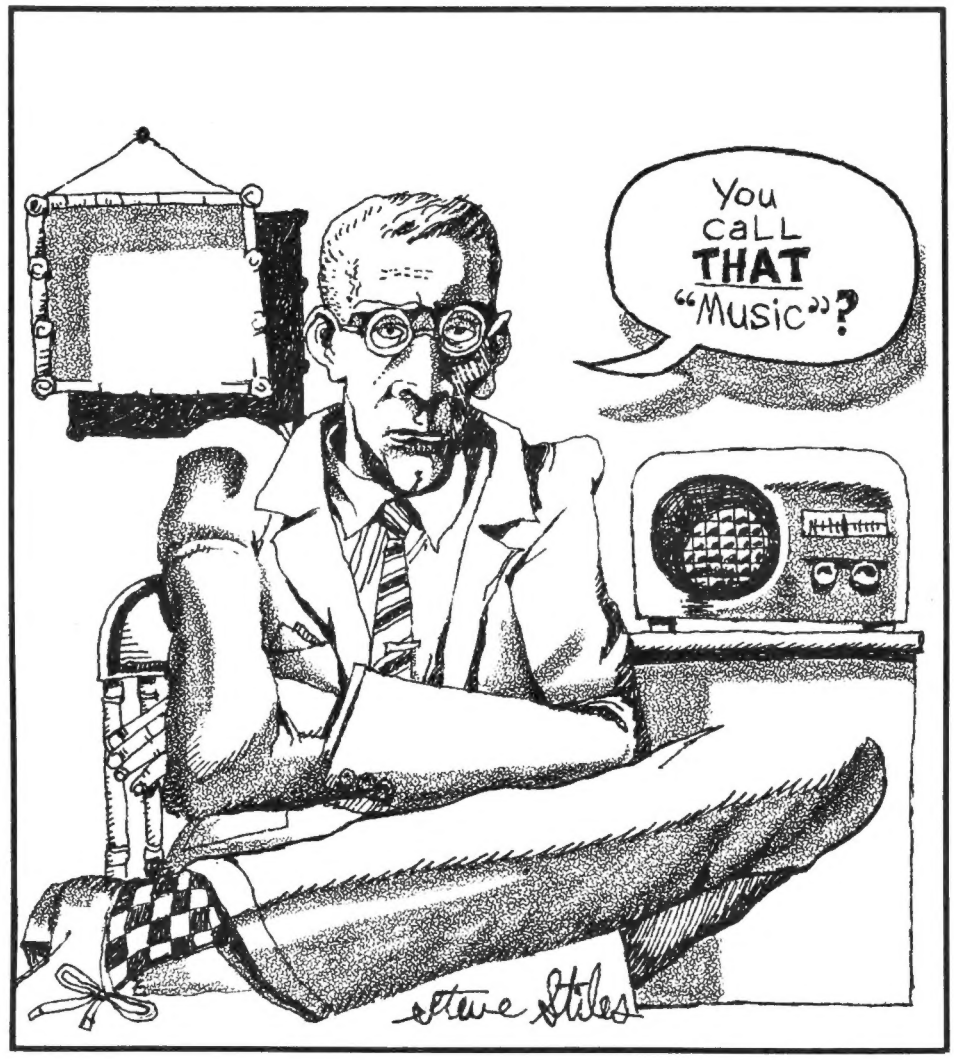
"PRE-SOLD AUDIENCES Tremendous hardcover publicity and sales have guaranteed unprecedented demand for the paperback. The millions of readers of Mr. Hubbard's New York Times and international bestsellers, including the blockbuster "Battlefield Earth," are anxiously awaiting the Mission Earth series in paperback. [all punctuation and spelling--sic]"

They even have a widely used endorsement for the first volume of the dekology, *The Invaders Plan*, by the winner of the past two years' Hugo and Nebula awards, Orson Scott Card: "Reading the Invaders Plan is simply the most fun you can have by yourself . . . [sic]" This is an impressive, albeit kinky, quote, unless you pause to consider that this same man wrote a five-page defense of Richard Nixon, of all people, in a recent issue of *F&SF*. Nixon is a character in Michael Bishop's *The Secret Ascension*, and Card felt that the poor unindicted co-conspirator simply wasn't being given a fair shake by today's writers and critics.

Flushed with a form of success, the Scientologists have just now begun an even bigger campaign for the paperback publication of the *Mission Earth* dekology. Bridge Publications employs more than a hundred people, and its companion literary agency, Author Services, Inc., another 29. "We have one client, L. Ron Hubbard." says David Bloomberg of Author Services.

During 1988, the Scientologists' resources will be thrown into a media-saturation campaign that will dwarf all others like it. There will be classified ads, bumper stickers, reverse-copy advertising (to stick in store windows), T-shirts, plastic bags, buttons, hats, ceiling banners, and a

EYEDITORIALS



By Brown & Steffan

sweepstakes. You can win two tickets on the first civilian space flight (or, if we simply don't get a civilian space program together—two tickets to anywhere in the world.) They don't say if you get two *return* tickets—so enter this sweepstakes at your own risk. $1 million of their $2.5 million ad budget will go to TV advertising.

Apparently, Hubbard wrote lyrics and melodies for several albums dozen rock songs based on people and events in the dekology. Edgar Winter has recorded these songs, intended as "audio background" for reading the books. We should see the vinyl sometime after the promo campaign gets underway.

(Books, by the way, aren't the only field in which the Scientologists are promoting themselves. There will be a Dianetics car entered in the next Indianapolis 500, driven by Al Unser, Sr. There will be yet another all–pervasive media campaign surrounding this car. Where will they strike next? A Dianetics baseball team?)

During the next year or two, the entire world will be more aware of these books' paperback publication than it probably wants to be. But there is a fatal flaw in all these plans. The Scientologists have gone too far.

The unvarnished truth, a truth that no amount of promotion will ever disguise, is that the books are dreadful. The emperor is quite, quite naked.

I spent an evening leafing through Volume VI, *Death Quest*. I came away from the experience deeply surprised and appalled. I had assumed that the dekology was simply more bad space opera, a la *Battlefield Earth* (Hubbard's previous novel). I was wrong. It is much worse.

This volume details the adventures of Inkswitch, a man who is devoted to the concept of "curing" lesbians by raping them into unconsciousness. When they return to their senses, they typically mutter: "Men, men, I need men!" and stagger away, "cured." Inkswitch is aided in his efforts by a harridan agent–figure named Miss Pinch. Most of the volume is devoted to a series of these rapes. The prose is hilariously bad, and the homophobia and other sexual attitudes displayed are deeply disturbing. One stylistic tic is Ron's insistence on using: (Bleep) whenever one of the Seven Deadly Words is called for. Always in parentheses, often with such odd neologisms as (bleepard) or (bleep–on).

Here is a sample:

A young girl named Teenie is on hand to observe a rape. Inkswitch is assisted in his efforts by a small staff:

"They grabbed her. They pulled off her oxfords. They turned her upside down and shucked her out of her pants. Her shirt went flying through the air, followed by her very masculine BVDs. Her breast compressor hit the wastebasket. 'After tonight,' Adora [Inkswitch's wife] *told her, 'you won't want that again ever.'"*

Inkswitch begins his rape: *"Mike's* [the lesbian] *face, close under me, showed wonder as she said, 'Oh, it isn't a falsie after all! Oh, you're wonderful!'*

But Teenie keeps interrupting the proceedings with a flash camera. The flashes throw Inkswitch offstride. This upsets him to the point where he grits his teeth and learns to disguise his own orgasm, so Teenie won't flash her camera at an inappropriate moment:

"I sat up triumphantly with a sneer at Teenie. In spite of her I had made it!"

The unfortunate lesbian under him responds:

"Mike cried, voice throbbing with passion, 'I have never, never, never felt anything so wonderful. A real MAN!'"

The Scientologists have gone too far. These books redefine bad prose. This manuscript should have been quietly buried as a whim of their guru's. Instead, they are giving it the world's biggest book promotion. After all they've done, after all their belligerent proselytizing, they have shown themselves, to be guilty of execrable taste.

Watching this campaign unfold will be amusing. Watching thousands of these books pass into the hands of people unaware of the genuine talent working in the SF field, people who will believe the advertising that this is the best SF has to offer, is not amusing. Caveat Emptor.

Much of the information for this editorial came from the February 26, 1988 issue of Publisher's Weekly, *see page 175.* ●

THE BIG PICTURE
By Dan Steffan

We sci fi readers are such dreamers. When I first visualized this magazine—in a fevre dream, I assure you—it looked a little bit like what you are now reading. I originally thought Steve and I could produce a large, coffee table size magazine in the tradition of Art Spiegleman and Francois Mouley's *Raw* magazine. It would be something that the SF community hadn't seen before.

It occurred to me that this, our first special fiction issue, would be an excellent place to try out this larger format. I knew that it was a completely different design challenge, but that is part of what appealed to me about it. I knew that collectors would scream bloody murder because they wouldn't be able to stack this issue next to the first two—and *forget* about binding them—but that also appealed to me in a perverse fashion. I knew it would be a bitch to mail, but considering our track record with the Post Awful, I really didn't think it mattered. They'd still fuck it up somehow. So I waded into this issue with determination on my face and a song in my heart. (The song was "Blasphemous Rumors" by Depeche Mode, if you must know . . .)

And almost immediately everything ground to a halt.

We started gathering the fiction and getting rewrites. I started talking to different artists about doing full page illustrations, and our first batch of advertisements began coming in. We were beginning to make progress when *Real Life* reared its ugly butt, and Steve and I found ourselves wallowing in muck instead of skimming the surface of the lake.

Steve attended the Worldcon in the U.K., taking time out from his job that was tough to recover, due to his immense workload. The magazine I work for entered a period of severe financial trouble that necessitated long hours and impossible deadlines. In November the Steffan home was burglarized for the second time in three years; with the intruders completely ransacking everything in sight. That month also marked the beginning of Steve's Christmas retail season, and seventy hour workweeks.

December began slipping by and the EYE wasn't ready to go out—wasn't even close. We hoped that the new year would straighten us out and we'd find more time to catch up . . .

Hah! We sci fi readers are such dreamers.

The new year saw Steve's decision to leave his job of nine years and join his Significant Other in her booming business; allowing him more time to devote to SF EYE. However, this also meant that Steve spent the first two months of 1988 giving intensive training sessions to the *three* people selected to replace him. It wasn't until the beginning of March that he could finally begin his new job.

In the meanwhile, Steffan was busy fending off creditors and the clock. I knew that SF EYE had to be out by Easter to make it to Balticon, but try as I might, I couldn't get the artists to finish their illustrations, and that included myself. I knew that this issue wouldn't be a success without the proper artwork, but getting it for free meant waiting for the artists to have the time to complete their paying projects. (In fact, as I write—one week before the printer deadline—we still await two illustrations. But I have faith.) I pushed and cajoled, but knew I had to wait, which meant that you had to wait. We think it was worth it.

But before you get comfortable, think about this: The format for SF EYE is scheduled to change *again* next issue. No, no, hold on, stop beating your head against the wall. Next issue's change will be our last. We have finally found a format that meets our needs and those of our advertisers and readers. SF EYE #4 will be perfect bound, feature color on the cover, and offer you more pages than ever before.

With this issue, our magazine completes its first cycle. We have made mistakes and we have had successes. But mostly we have learned how much work it is to produce a magazine like this and are now applying those lessons to the future.

We think you'll agree that SF EYE is going to get better.

Our fourth issue will be available in June, with all subsequent issues following in regular four month increments. If you've been as disappointed as we have been with our lateness, we hope you'll hang on long enough to let us prove that we can produce the magazine on time and with ever–increasing creativity.

POST MORTEM:

We've had a bit of bad luck with the Post Office since producing our second issue. There have been a handful of you who have complained about missing your copies, which has necessitated our sending replacements. There has been the odd lost letter. And then there was the mystery of our disappearing P.O. box.

It seems that during the month of February, the Post Office did not receive our box renewal fee.

And, as is their habit, they discontinued our box. And, as is also their habit, did not bother to notify us of this activity. It was only after I went to pick up a month's worth of mail that I discovered this problem and began the arduous task of trying to straighten out a mistake made by the Post Office.

At first they were reluctant to acknowledge that there was any other problem except our negligence in paying our bill. Their attitude changed upon being shown appropriate records that proved we had *mailed* the payment to them from their own postal location. That well–known civil servant cockiness melted in the face of the obvious, and they quickly fixed things.

Unfortunately, our old box had already been given away to some Third World toothpick importer. Nothing could be done to get it back, but they promised we'd love our new box—it's bigger and located on a completely different wall.

So now we have a new address:

P.O. Box 43244, Washington, DC 20010–9244

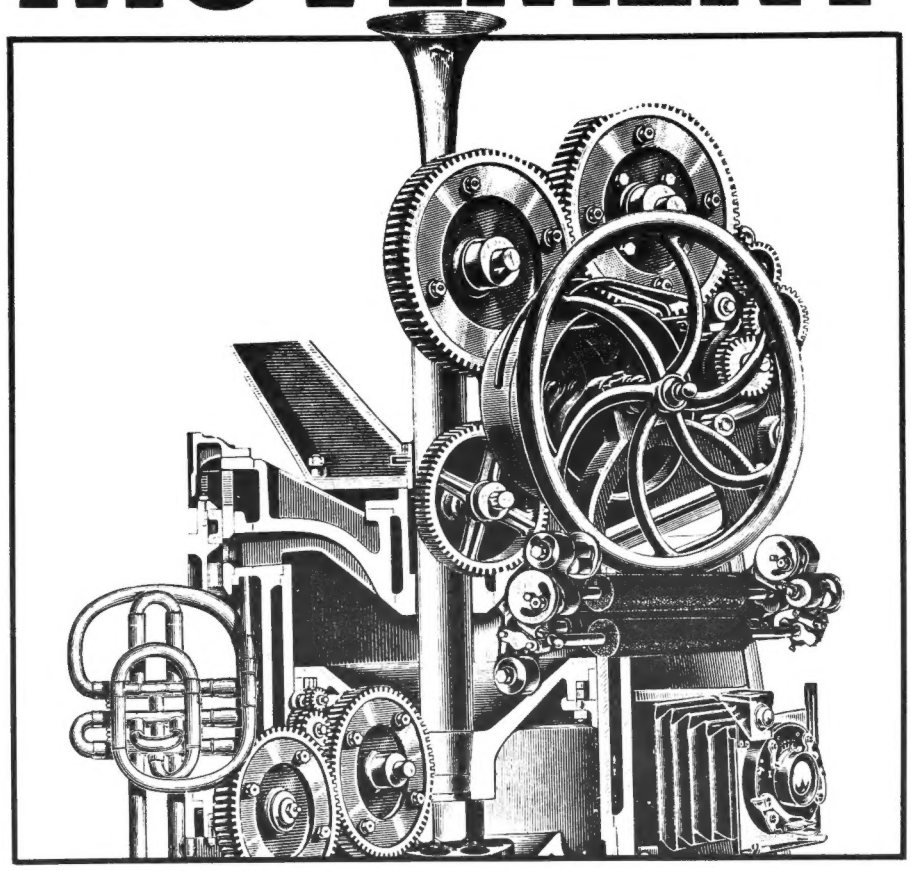
Mail will be forwarded at the old box number for a year. If you had any problems reaching us during February, please try us again. If you had a letter returned, we'd be happy to reimburse you for your postage.

Meanwhile, drop us a line and see if we get it.

SF EYE: the magazine with delusions of order amongst the chaos.

We sci fi readers are such dreamers . . . ●

RAPID EYE MOVEMENT



Letters of Comment

JOHN SHIRLEY
221 Green Lea Place
Thousand Oaks, CA 91361

In the letters column of EYE #1, Elisabeth "I don't want to slam Americans, but they're all arrogant immature bastards" Vonarburg, and Alexis "you're a lot of silly lost children in need of my lofty patriarchal perspective" Gilliland indulge in some very cavalier sniping––and Pat Murphy is simply mistaken.

Vonarburg claims that––God Help Me, I'm going to have to use the term––Cyberpunk is in some odd way nationalistic, that we're uninterested in conditions outside the US, and that we haven't taken into account the fact that technology has different kinds of impact in different countries. Nonsense. Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix* could not be more omnicultural; my own *Eclipse* takes place chiefly in Europe and is very concerned with Europeans––even more so in *Eclipse Penumbra*, the second book in the trilogy. I'm influenced by a number of European writers and thinkers. As for technology, the impact of the new technologies and the *new* computer science will be felt as profoundly in Quebec as in New York City. It will simply overwhelm the world. The changes will come like a hurricane. And these changes are not especially of American origin. They have as much to do with changes in consciousness resulting from radically increased information exchange as they do with technology per se.

As for our supposed "maleness" wagging about when we're "posturing" and showing "aggressiveness" and "jockeying for position" etc . . . what a sexist thing for you to say, Elisabeth. Women are quite capable of this so-called posturing and aggressiveness and find it just as necessary at times. Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, the various leaders of the National Organization of Women, or simply any woman who cares to assert herself. Aggressiveness is really a misreading of simple assertiveness in this context––and is not at all confined to the male province. It's indulged in at all levels of maturity. It is not adolescent––it's human.

If it seems to some readers a strange thing that I'm talking as if posturing and aggressiveness are acceptable, well, sorry to offend your fragile sensibility, but it's childish to pretend that it is not necessary to be loud and assertive and, yes, to "posture" occasionally. Posturing is just body language, whether it's a body of organic stuff or a body of rhetoric. To me it's just a means of emphasis. It's like italics or bold face. On some occasions it's more like making an incisive move in a chess game. It's just style, and shouldn't detract from the substance of what is said. I don't think I do it much. I think that from time to time I get fed up with obfuscation and the defensive obtusity of the status quo. I find it necessary to cut through the bullshit with a little aggressiveness. A debate requires a certain amount of aggressiveness, otherwise the whole thing turns into mashed potatoes.

And Pat Murphy, you're a fine writer but . . . It's really a joke, accusing "cyberpunks" of clubbiness. The SF field is wired with scores of cliques and crony-clubs. The field's core of SFWA sweethearts is as insular as anything else. On the one hand you people accuse Bruce Sterling of including too many writers in Cyberpunk brackets, on the other you say cyberpunks are "exclusive." The truth is, people who claim the Movement is clubby have fallen victim to a mirage. The Movement asserts that something important is happening, that we're excited about it––and because we're pointing at it and making excited noises they take this to mean "This is all that interests us and we're not interested in what the rest of you have to offer." This is a childish, whiny, shallow interpretation. Never once have I or Sterling consigned the older (or other types of) writers to "the dustbin of history" as Gilliland has it. Sterling has written articles in praise of Verne and Lem, and is just as enthusiastic about Brian Aldiss as about William Gibson.

Those of us who have been labeled "cyberpunk" are already going on to what we feel is the next step––which is probably different for each of us. But the significance of the Movement (and I'm not saying it's the only thing of significance in the field, okay?) can't be denied. "Less here than meets the eye" Gilliland? Articles about cyberpunk have appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The LA Times*, *The London Times*, *Whole Earth Review*, *High Times*, various high-power TV programs have done features on it . . . I get letters enthusiastic about it from people in (take note, Elisabeth) France, Austria, Japan, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, South America . . . the general public, globally, responds to it. Why? Because it's a fad, Gilliland? Because we're posturing, Elisabeth? Do you really believe that? I think they're responding because they find it unusually relevant to their lives and what they can glimpse of their own future. And because it has a preferable energy level and a frankness that is a blessed relief.

I don't think anyone involved in "cyberpunk" made any "rhetorical flourishes about the evils of capitalism," Gilliland. Are you accusing us of being a bunch of closet Communists? Lot of bullshit.

You don't find people "dying for ideals, moral choices" in cyberpunk? You do in *Eclipse*––that's what it's all about. And in Gibson's work people are searching for ideals, morals, and seeing them subtly in the complex tapestry of the evolving modern world.

Gilliland refers to "fuzzy-minded anti-technological" types. Is he including me in this? I'm quite enthusiastic about technology. As the nursery rhyme said, when it's good, it's very very good, and when it's bad, it's horrid. I'm no Luddite. I favor constant R&D in technology, in science––I also favor keeping a weather eye out for any negative side effects of new technologies. But rather than abandoning those technologies and moving to a farm, I advocate taming them. I think we can have industry without waste, without pollution, if we want to spend the money; if we search for technological solutions to technological problems. I for one can't wait to directly interface with a computer; to jack in and communicate directly. To become that intimate with technology.

Contrary to what Alexis G. claims, there's been a great deal of hostility to cyberpunk. Gilliland hasn't seen it because he hasn't been on the receiving end. And I don't think it's directed only at "certain individuals" (*me* he implies . . . implying I'm an asshole everyone can justly target for their hostility . . .), it's clear from Gilliland's patronizing, condescending, sneering tone that *he's* hostile to the whole notion.

The bottom line is this: cyberpunk tends to blur the boundaries of the field. It attracts the interest of the mainstream, and it draws on mainstream influences, as well as influences from the non-SF art and social-theory underground, and this threatens people like Gilliland who enjoy the insularity of the field, enjoy being big fish, relatively, in the small pond of SF, and don't want anyone to break the local dam.

And this is my last fucking word on this subject. Honest.

Destroy all labels! Smash all genres! Pigeonholing creates the kinds of criticism that Shirley is responding to. We here at the EYE believe that all works of fiction should be cast into the world, naked and bleeding, to be rudely judged against the works of all writers of this odd form of fantasy called "fiction." The SF field has long been guilty of subdividing itself into a myriad of little groups, hotly defending their turf, as Shirley points out. The very notion of a "cyberpunk" group is a prime example. Rarely has even SF seen a subgroup so fiercely defended and denied by its creators, so worshipped and vilified by its readers. The hell with it, we say. Read your bloody novels against the context of all *novels, and save the bickering for questions of true substance.*

EILEEN GUNN
525 19th Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98112

SF EYE #2 whips the reader around 90 degrees, kicks her crutches away, laughs maniacally at her unfounded expectation that issue #2 would be more of issue #1, and threatens her with a suicidally non-standard format for issue #3. I also liked Rudy Rucker's portrait of himself as the Hunter Thompson of science fiction.

You should be in possession of John's check for his own bloody-well separate subscription, and it should be clear that we are indeed a two-SF EYE household. I want you to know that this is the first publication of any kind that we have been totally unable to share. We each want to read it all first. It's similar to the problem of who gets all the bedclothes, but easier to solve. I wish we could subscribe to separate blankets.

EYE plans to institute a blanket subscription service sometime in late 1989. We will keep you posted as to the details, including our regular monthly pillow service. Uniformed EYE delivery people will show up at you house on the first of every month with the latest in psycho-cybertronic bedwear. Watch for the little black vans with the large EYEball on the side.

ANDREW WATSON
5809 South Kenton Way
Englewood, CA 80111

The second issue of SF EYE lives up to the high standard set by the first issue in both appearance and content. Congrats. Please consider the rest of this letter as a response to Ted White's unfortunate remarks in the otherwise excellent PKD section.

I was disturbed by the inclusion of the Ted White piece in the PKD section. Too often, the Philip K. Dick Society is given cult status by outsiders who do not know any better. As a charter and current member, Ted's reference to PKDS as "the cult which Phil's friends of the '70's and '80's have built around him since his death" is inexplicable. Every issue of the PKDS Newsletter (which constitutes the entirety of our activity) has been mailed to him, so he should know as well as anyone what the society is all about.

PKDS is not a cult. We are sustained by an ever-increasing interest in the work of Philip K. Dick. Our membership (about a thousand people, worldwide) includes only a handful of people who actually knew Phil before his death. The society was not "built" by anyone––it has been formed by popular consensus and continues on that basis. Paul Williams was indeed the society's founder, but it derives its strength from its widely distributed grass-roots support.

I read all the mail directed to PKDS, in the course of maintaining our database. I have read *hundreds* of heartfelt expressions of enthusiasm for the work of Philip K. Dick, written by people delighted to learn that PKDS exists and wanting more information about its activities on behalf of one of the few writers who ever touched them so deeply that their lives were permanently changed. I kid you not. These people are not Phil's last round of cronies exploiting his death for fun and profit, as Ted suggests. The sustaining force behind the continuing operation of PKDS comes from people who never knew Phil at all except through his books.

We are consistently amazed, each time we go to press, by the quantity of material available for the PKDS Newsletter. Far from waning, we have had to reduce typesize to fit more copy and delay many pieces for future issues because there is always too much for it. This phenomenon is a function of the depth of Phil's files (he saved *everything*), the sheer volume of his work, the emotional resonance which his writings have generated in his readers, the important correlation between events in his personal life and the content of his fiction (which makes biographical

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SOME *REAL* MOTHERS

An Interview With
SAMUEL R. DELANY

By Takayuki Tatsumi

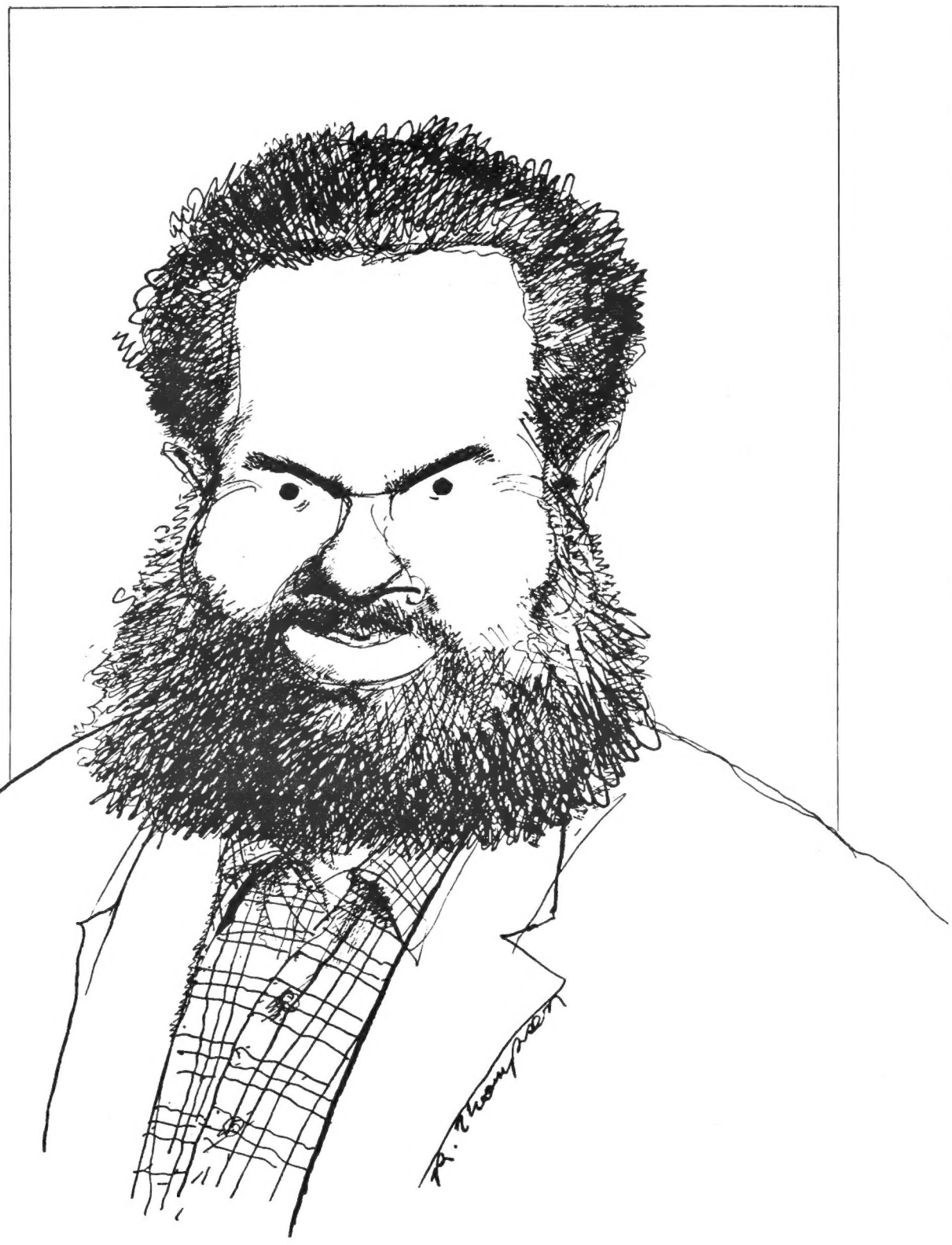


ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD THOMPSON

This Interview is Dedicated to the Memory of
ALFRED BESTER (1913-1987)

TAKAYUKI TATSUMI: *Let me begin with a brief introduction. Last autumn [1986] it was very exciting to watch you teach science fiction--especially the cyberpunk writers--at Cornell University, where you were a senior fellow at Cornell's Society for the Humanities, and I had a chance to sit in on your seminar. Chiefly, you focused on a comparison of John Varley and William Gibson, along with a psychoanalytic reading of their works, giving us an insight into what's going on in the current history of science fiction. Today I'd like to discuss with you your thoughts on cyberpunk, and SF after cyberpunk, based on your experiences at Cornell. To begin with, let me ask you, how did you like Cornell?*

SAMUEL R. DELANY: Well, it was a wonderful experience. It gave me a chance to talk about some ideas that had been percolating down for a year or more. Also, it was just a chance to think.

Paradoxically, the one thing that professional writers--writers who earn their living from their work--are not encouraged to do is think.

I don't mean thinking about your work--how to make it better; how a sentence might be interpreted; how a story might be read; what you can use in everything from your afternoon walk by the grocery to the TV movie you catch at three in the morning. That's the way a hunter thinks about hunting, or a dry cleaner thinks about cleaning fluids. It has too much the mark of necessity and survival.

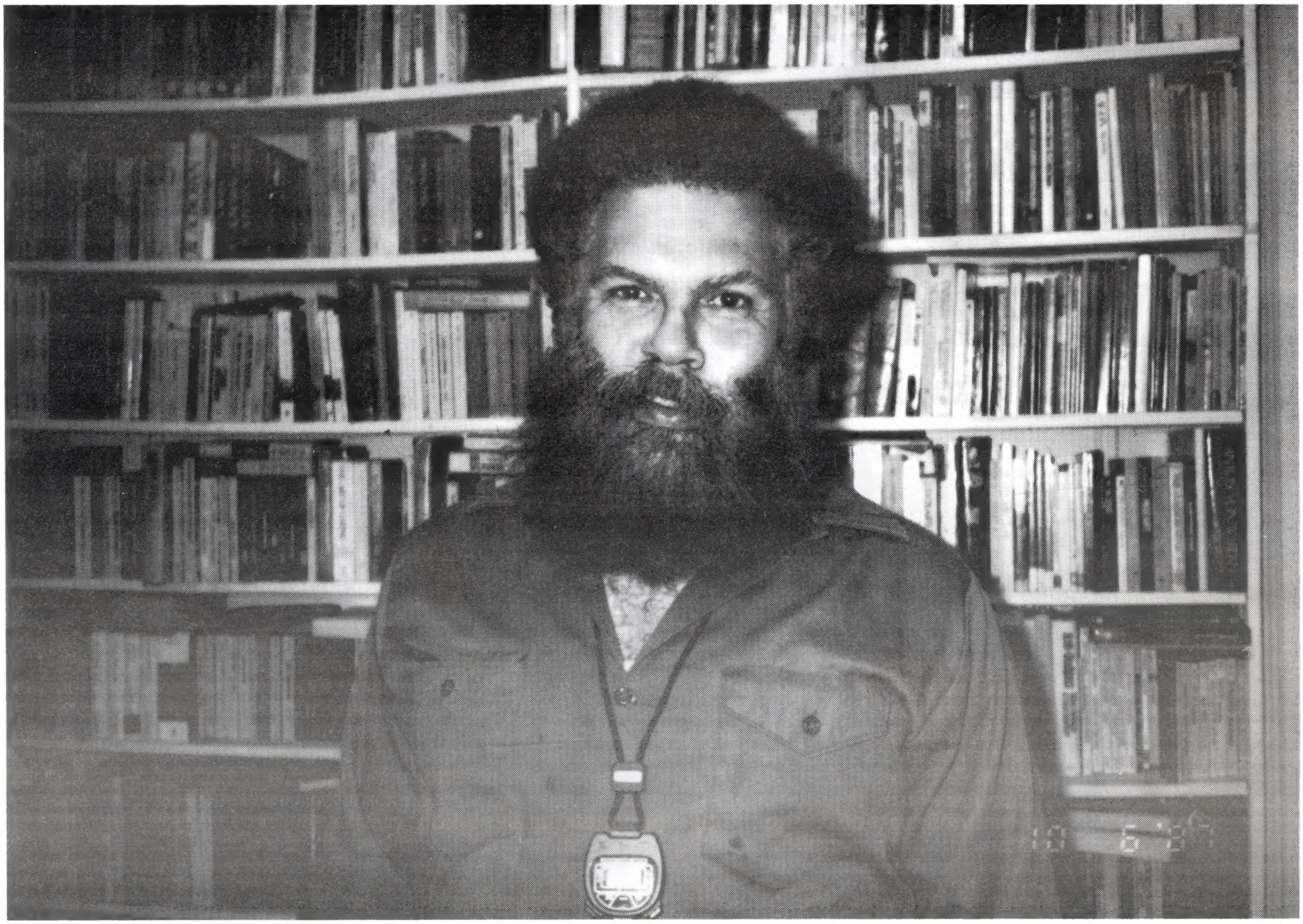
I mean thinking as an abstract process, where, in a social situation, problems--or even situations--are put before you, and, in discussion or alone, you're encouraged just to think about them. Since I've come back [from Cornell], I've finished one long story (or short novel), "The Tale of Rumor and Desire," that is part of a new Nevèrÿon book, *The Bridge of Lost Desire.* I couldn't tell you directly how much of the Cornell experience went into it.

The landscape did.

There's one scene in a gorge, which is one of the Ithaca gorges (at Treeman Park) transformed a bit.

TATSUMI: *The influence of landscape upon literature is very intriguing. However J.G. Ballard's "inner space" seems quite different from Gibson's "cyberspace;" Ballard's springs from his own experience in China; cyberspace functions both as the product of a high-tech imagination and as the playground for a certain stylistic experimentation. In this sense you were right when, in class, you compared Gibson's cyberspace to Alfred Bester's typographic experiments that configured Gully Foyle's synesthesia while he space-time jaunted in* The Stars My Destination. *Could you tell me a little bit more about the relationship between scientific idea and science fictional style?*

DELANY: My first thought, when you bring this up, is not so much a stylistic one as a formal one. Science fiction has often taken new areas of conceptual space, then inflated them with language.



The very first turning to outer space as a real place to write about, by Leinster, Heinlein, Williamson, and Van Vogt, was very much the same verbal strategy.

Suddenly there was a new space to deal with.

Then you inject a great deal of lyrical language into this particular area and see what happens to it, happens in it. And that's what Gibson is doing with cyberspace . . . it's a similar strategic move. A thought on form, but it has its stylistic aspect--it makes a stylistic distinction.

TATSUMI: *Did that have anything to do with your selection of the Robert Heinlein and Roger Zelazny stories for your seminar?*

DELANY: No, this is actually a pretty new idea to me. It's not one I've spent a lot of time thinking about. The selection of the Zelazny and Heinlein stories had to do with their approach to psychoanalysis--the use of psychoanalysis in Heinlein's "The Roads Must Roll" and in Zelazny's "He Who Shapes" . . . although the dream space in "He Who Shapes" is very similar to cyberspace: both are conceptual spaces that, with the help of technology, we can enter. You can die in either one. The language with which Zelazny talks about the dreams that Render can control is very different from the general narrative voice of his tale in the same way that the language that Gibson uses to discuss moving through cyberspace is different; in the same way that Bester's synesthetic language in *The Stars My Destination* is different. The original title for "He Who Shapes" was "The Ides of October"--which is to say, a figure of rhetorically distorted language. The ides of October, you'll recall from the story, is a time whose possibility or impossibility we can only even talk about when we are in the dream space created by the Ro-womb.

That beautiful, poetic, and ultimately non-commercial title was taken off the story by its initial editor, Cele Goldsmith, because it did not name the subject (in either sense) of the story. It was rather a verbal tag for a pertinent subspace--the space that the story was really about. It was a sign of a space in which language could be distorted in a certain way, giving us access to certain purely verbal constructs.

TATSUMI: *It reminds me of one of your own verbal constructs, your title* Starboard Wine. *Even the title* Dhalgren *is a tag for a particular process, created of expectation and verbal highlighting, rather than a name for a person or a place that the book will then observe, explore, or circle in on.*

DELANY: Outer space itself began as a kind of subspace that sat next to . . . well, planetary-surface-space.

TATSUMI: *Roger Zelazny is one of the authors Gibson doesn't mention often. But surely his second novel,* Count Zero, *reminds us greatly of Zelazny. Does that also have something to do with it?*

DELANY: Maybe Gibson is blind to any mention of Zelazny because they're too much alike. There's a certain stylistic thrust Zelazny and Gibson share. Both of them indulge a kind of Jacobean gorgeousness, coupled with a love of the "hard-boiled." Also the initial excitement both generated in the SF readership at the very beginning of their careers--Zelazny from '62 to '67, Gibson between '81 and '86--is similar. The initial image of both is that of considered stylists.

TATSUMI: *What about your seminar selection of another story, "Baby is Three," by Theodore Sturgeon? That has something to do with intersubjectivity, as you've mentioned . . . perhaps?*

DELANY: Again, the reason I selected it, at the time (for one of the three introductory stories we dealt with before launching into Varley and Gibson *per se*) was because the frame of the story was a psychoanalytic session; and, at that particular point,

I was dealing with science fiction's view of psychoanalysis.

The proposed structure of the seminar was first, you'll recall, to pull out of, or even to construct from, a reading of Heinlein, Sturgeon and Zelazny, a kind of composite science fictional view of psychoanalysis. I wanted to read this science fictional construct closely against Lacan, the two of them mutually critiquing one another. You'll recall from the seminar that, by and large in SF, the initial point of transference is not the father but the state. It's there in a patently politically conservative work, e.g. in Heinlein's "Roads Must Roll;" it's there in an insistently liberal work, e.g. in Zelazny's "He Who Shapes." It's put most clearly in Sturgeon's "Baby is Three," during Gerry's bit of free association, where he thinks: "I ate from the plate of the state and I hate."

Ten years ago Luise White (in the "Women in Science Fiction Symposium," *Khatru*, 1976) noted that, for a male-dominated field, SF had an astonishing range of active, vigorous women characters--far more than many of us suspected--authored indiscriminately by men and women. But she also went on to point out an over-riding pattern: these women invariably worked either directly for the state, or for some male-run institution that controlled so much power and revenue, it might as well be a state in itself.

These are not patterns common to naturalistic fiction. But they are inescapable as soon as you turn to science fiction. From Susan Calvin (the psychiatrist in Isaac Asimov's Robot series) to Molly Million (the mercenary adventurer of Gibson's world), science fiction has an astonishing gallery of good "phallic mothers." But their bosses either are the state, or are financially powerful enough to challenge, threaten, and topple states. This fact is intricately related, somewhere in the political unconscious of science fiction, to the transference phenomenon we've already noted.

It was only after teasing out--or putting together--this theoretical superstructure that I wanted to use it to read a pre-cyberpunk writer like Varley and a cyberpunk proper (if one can speak of such) such as Gibson, and see the movement from one to the other, as the SF field had made them centers of excitement and attention, in terms of it.

We were only partly successful.

But it's hard not to note that the psychoanalytic session turns memory itself into a kind of subspace: a space of narration, of nostalgia, of ideological intricacies (i.e., a space of blame and resignation), and of lyricism.

Paraspace would really be a better term than subspace.

If we're going to explore this idea further, we have to note that our paraspaces are not in a hierarchical relation--at least not in a simple and easy hierarchical relation--to the narrative's "real," or ordinary, space. What goes on in one subverts the other; what goes on in the other subverts the one. They change their weights all the time, throughout their stories. So calling it a subspace--with the prefix's strong suggestion of subordination --is wrong. A paraspace, or even an alternative space, with its much weaker--and more problematic --question of position and troubling supplementarity, is more to the point.

"Maybe Gibson is blind to any mention of Zelazny because they're too much alike. There's a certain stylistic thrust Zelazny and Gibson share."

TATSUMI: *In terms of cyberspace, it all does seem to have started with Bester's synesthetic effect. As we read through* Neuromancer, *we hear punk music throughout the visual images from the high-tech world. How do you describe that kind of syn-esthetics?*

DELANY: You can only draw it out from an actual examination of the rhetorical figures used to write about these paraspaces. I'd have to have the texts in front of me, and point out the actual verbal plays that constitute the text of cyberspace, that constitute the text of synesthesia, that constitute the text of the "Ro-Womb" in "He Who Shapes." It's the same kind of thing that happens in Algis Budrys' 1960 novella, "Rogue Moon." Inside that strange alien artifact--a hundred meters across, twenty meters high, and, significantly, on the dark side of the moon--things of great import happen . . . they result in death for Al Barker--again, and again, and again. Yet, these spaces are very different from standard FTL "hyperspace," that instrumental space we pass through in order to bridge great distances, where, in most stories, we spend only a second or two, a sentence or two. That's a functional and useful--and at the same time highly subordinated--space. In its functionality, in its usefulness, it's subordinated to the plot, to getting from here to there.

This alternative space is a place where we actually endure, observe, learn, and change--and sometimes die. With these paraspaces the plot is shaped, as it were, to them. And inside them, the language itself undergoes changes--the language the writer uses to describe what happens in it is always shifted, is always rotated, is always aspiring toward the lyric.

In the case of Budrys, the passage through this space splits the subject: into an M (or moon form) and into an L (or laboratory form, back on earth), while the space itself, merely a complex of "rules, and crazy logic; Alice in Wonderland with teeth," remains impassive, unresponsive, yet murderous.

Finally the synesthetic passages in Bester accomplish something very close to this same splitting, or doubling, of the subject: the Burning Man, that demonic version of Gully, which keeps appearing at moments of tension throughout the story, and whose origin, we finally learn, is that mystical conflagration in the cathedral, towards the book's climax.

It would be interesting to look at a number of these various paraspaces in terms of the way the language is used within them.

TATSUMI: *You presuppose, very naturally then, a consistency between the scientific idea and your own style of working--or language: the technologically constituted paraspace becomes the locus of a more lyrical language. In your own work,* Babel-17, *say, the paraspace would be the discorporate sector--first in the port city, then in the great shadow ship. As in "Rogue Moon," this paraspace is also associated with death. It's the space where a whole necessary aspect of rhetoric, involving the shifters "I" and "you," is learned. In* The Einstein Intersection, *the paraspace would probably be the source cave--which is associated with history (and is also where Lobey first sees, in the old television, Kid Death directly): in these paraspaces death and history seem somehow to bear a relation at once antagonistic and complicit. In* Nova, *we only spend one brief, bright moment in it, when the Roc passes inside the hollow of the nova itself; and we encounter the words "deaths," "death," and "dead" at least five times.*

DELANY: You know, the one writer I never figured this applied to was me . . .

TATSUMI: *It's interesting that in a later work, like* Triton, *your paraspace is completely social: the unlicensed sector in the Tethys complex, where the laws for the rest of the city don't hold. While in* Dhalgren, *except for the first chapter (and even there . . .) it's nothing* but *a paraspace.*

DELANY: Yes, what's that marvelous line from that appalling SF picture? I think it's *Slave Girls from Beyond Infinity.* Once they enter the temple, one slave girl turns to the other and says, "I have the strangest feeling the normal laws of time and space no longer apply."

TATSUMI: *The distinction between ordinary narrative space and a technological lyrical paraspace is allegorized by the distinction between "narrative" language and "lyrical" language, then?*

DELANY: I suppose that holds as long as you remember that both ordinary language and lyrical language are equally rhetorical. There's a wonderful spot in "Rogue Moon," before Barker has entered the paraspace, where Hawks, who, at the beginning knows more about the inside of the paraspace than anyone else in the story, is telling Barker what he knows: he describes the death of one of the previous explorers (the man's body looked as if it had fallen from a height of several thousand meters under terrestrial gravity), and Barker asks him a question: "Could that have happened?"

Hawks replies: "No."

And Barker responds, phatically, "I see,"

To which Hawks returns, "I can't see, Barker. And neither can anyone else."

In short, the play or ordinary rhetoric--the "transparent" language that we all assume, willy nilly, is somehow apart from rhetoric--is there suddenly called into question. It's rhetorical quality is suddenly foregrounded. The ideas and ignorances it allows us to slide over and slip across are brought sharply to the fore.

But it's important that this happens, *not* when --somewhat anticlimactically--Hawks and Barker travel through the paraspace itself, with its "shafts of crystal transparency open[ing] through the folds of green and white, with flickering red light dimly visible at their far ends and blue, green, yellow

heaving up from underfoot," its "crystalline transparent projections jutting out from the red wall," or its "enormous featureless plain of panchromatic greys and blacks." There, a more traditional notion of rhetoric is being foregrounded and, indeed, being allegorized by a set of colorful rhetorical figurations.

Nor does the allegory end there. In a science fiction text, ordinary space is just as technologically contoured as any of these technologically constituted paraspaces--from cyberspace to outer space itself. But ordinary space (like ordinary language) is the place where the characters are likely to forget that technological contouring, just as characters, enmeshed in ordinary language, are likely to lose the sense of its rhetoricity.

At least half of Theodore Sturgeon's verbal poetry was expended on lush, vivid, and precise descriptions of the emotions of his characters; but the other half was lavished on luminous evocations of astonishing machines that often performed impossibly complex technical tasks.

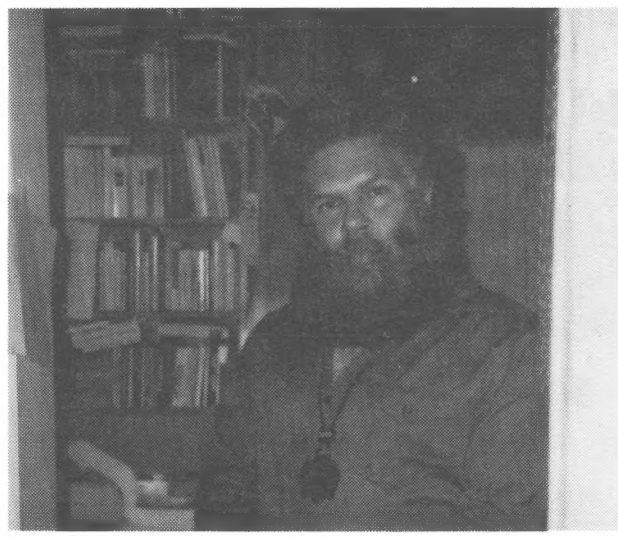
We've broached a very interesting, even exciting point: in science fiction, rhetoricity often allegorizes technology--and the awareness of technology; especially technology that's perceived as being beyond ours.

TATSUMI: *Cyberpunk is often characterized by mirrorshades. We can see it first in John Shirley's* City Come a'Walkin'. *But the metaphor of mirrorshades is important not only because mirrorshades sound punkish, but because mirrorshades are described as the effect of the prosthesis--and frequently as prostheses that give us our own sense of reality.*

I wonder if cyberpunk doesn't make the most of mirrorshades, at least partly inspired by your Dhalgren, *in which Kid wears the optic chain, looped upon his body, a chain made up of prisms, lenses, and mirrors. As such, your chapter title "Prism, Mirror, Lens" is very interesting. Do you think the obsession with mirrorshades has something to do with what you've called "the distortion of the present?"*

DELANY: I've written that science fiction does not try to predict the future. Rather it offers us a significant distortion of the present. But to try and see the distortion that takes place on the reflective surface of a pair of mirrorshades as an allegory of science fictional distortion in general may be to stretch allegory to the tearing point--where the glare blinds us to its logic, to its psychology; where the sound of the music drowns out just the dialogue with the contemporary that distortion's significance encompasses.

Mirrorshades would seem, rather, to have something to do with the science fictional gaze. What are mirrorshades, after all? They're a thin film of reflective mylar. They cut off your gaze--at any rate, darken what you see. At the same time, they mask the gaze's source. Someone looking at you cannot tell whether you're looking at them or looking away. Thus they both mask the gaze and distort the gaze. They protect us against a painful light. At the same time, they displace the gaze of the reader, who must always look at himself or herself any time she or he seeks to find the origin of the gaze. All you can find is yourself--which I think is a nice allegory of what is happening in this particular kind of science fiction.



TATSUMI: *Do you think of that in terms of psychoanalysis?*

DELANY: I think it suggests a psychoanalytic reading.

TATSUMI: *Mirrorshades constitute a state of mind?*

DELANY: Well, they constitute the structure of a particular displacement of the notion of vision--and since the whole notion of the gaze comes from Lacan, and from Lacan's emphasis on the mirror stage, the text becomes someplace where you look to see what's going on, only what you see is yourself looking at the text to see what's going on--while at the same time, the text presents a gaze that is somehow darkened, distorted, and reflected.

TATSUMI: *You mean reading the literary text is just like looking at the text through mirrorshades?*

DELANY: It's not quite clear whether you're the one wearing the mirrorshades or whether the text is wearing them. I think in cyberpunk the text is wearing them--the mirrorshades.

TATSUMI: *I'd like to take up the idea of prosthesis; because, in Gibson's and Sterling's cases, we can find a kind of ambiguous boundary between the human and the mechanical. In this sense we must say that cyberpunk's question is the very notion of boundary--as, for example, in the name of the hero of* Neuromancer, *Case. Gibson suggests that the human body is simply a case, a frame. Could this be the reason why* Nova *is sometimes called the first cyberpunk novel?*

DELANY: Is it?

But how could I possibly comment on that?

One interesting thing about cyberpunk, however, is that, while usually we consider the prosthetic relation where the prosthesis is helping us to deal with some kind of loss that we've sustained, in cyberpunk some prosthetic relationships are deadly--like the sacks of poison that are going to melt and kill Case. Or the "prosthesis" in Tom Maddox's story "Snake Eyes." In Gibson's case/Case, the prostheses are deep inside the body and work to sabotage it.

Thus, in *Count Zero,* there's that extraordinary scene, after the holovid star gets blown up, where we see the man walking through the airport, carrying the case that looks like it was made for two billiard balls, and we just know that it contains her salvaged prosthetic eyes.

Not all of them are baleful, of course. The skeleton the performer wears in "Winter Market," and with Molly Million in *Neuromancer* and "Johnny Mnemonic," you don't know quite where the prosthesis ends and the body begins. There's always a kind of ambiguity--like Molly's mirrorshades that are actually replacement eyes.

TATSUMI: *As for Molly, Gibson's characterization of her reminded me of Rydra Wong in* Babel-17, *in some sense.*

DELANY: Ah, but the person she reminded me of most was Jael in Joanna Russ's *Female Man.* Both of them have retractable claws in their fingers. Both of them wear black. Both enjoy their sex with men. And there's a similar harshness in their attitudes.

I'm sure Gibson would admit that his particular kind of female character would have been impossible to write without the feminist science fiction from the seventies--i.e., the feminist SF whose obliteration created such a furor when Bruce Sterling (inadvertently of course . . . ?) ellided it from his introduction to *Burning Chrome.*

Sometimes it seems as though these male writers were trying to sublate the whole feminist movement unto themselves--which can only be done at the expense of history. But simply because the influence of the feminist writers is so strong on male writers like Gibson, I don't think we will ever be able to lose it historically.

It's always seem to me that Varley, a writer whose feminist sympathies are pretty much there on the surface, was really trying again and again--now in "The Phantom of Kansas," now in "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank," now in *The Ophiuchi Hotline*--to wrestle with, to argue vehemently with, to somehow rewrite in a new and acceptable form, Budrys' "Rogue Moon." In "Rogue Moon," you'll recall, Al Barker, the man in love with death, dies again and again--and it doesn't really matter. Well, Varley keeps telling us, it's got to matter--somehow, at least to the person who dies. And yet the coherence of the story is always fighting that notion that he's putting forward--the notion of the reality of death--so that this Oedipal struggle I see between him and Father A.J. is taken up and dramatized in his stories, in text after text.

Gibson, however, is constantly rerewriting Russ and Le Guin. We've already talked about what Gibson's Molly owes to Russ' Jael. (It's only the world of Russ's novel that makes Gibson's Molly signify in his: in Gibson's world, there are neither Jeanines or Janets--only various Jael incarnations.)

But take a look at Le Guin's societies: they're all loose webs of courts, kibbutzim, and academies. As such, all their institutions are highly structured and very protected places.

Now hold up against this Gibson's Urban Sprawl, and you can suddenly hear the shrill--one yearns to say "hysterical"--protest against that ordered social template around which Le Guin organizes her world.

The bricolage of Gibson's style, now colloquial, now highly formal, now hardboiled, makes him as a writer a gomi no sensei--a master of junk. Applied to Gibson, it's a laudatory title. But it would be absurd to apply such a term to Le Guin. And it's precisely on that rhetorical level that he argues with, cannibalizes, and rewrites her.

But in science fiction, the intertextual dialogue has always been all.

TATSUMI: *In a lecture you gave at Cornell on the work of biologist and cultural critic Donna Haraway,*

and her article, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," you referred to a kind of surplus of metaphor in terms of logic that is supposed to be produced by a kind of . . . deconstruction of gender?

DELANY: The surplus I discussed was something that comes with any metaphor. A metaphor (or simile) always produces a logical structure--a structure that, in itself, is almost always wholly semantic. ("Why is a raven like a writing desk?" "Because Poe wrote on both.") But there's always a psychological surplus, poetic and organized far more at the level of the letter. ("Feathers, leather, wings, wood, stone, bone, beak, brass, eyes, handles, claws, drawers . . .") And the tension between the logical, semantic structure and the psychological, poetic surplus is, I think, what produces the energy and vividness of metaphor. The logic and the psychology in tension make for the cyborg view of the metaphor. The logic is the technological aspect. The psychology is the organic aspect. The two feed back on each other--in the same gesture with which they open each other up.

TATSUMI: *What, in that view of metaphor, could necessarily change the orthodox view of the cyborg?*

DELANY: I don't think it changes the orthodox view. I think it grows out of the orthodox view. I think it recomplicates on the orthodox. It's the same kind of metaphoric distribution over itself that Derrida makes of the whole notion of writing, which goes out and subsumes voice and pulls it up against itself, until the boundary between becomes unlocatable, and recasts the whole notion of voice, so that you can have things that are purely oral, yet still partake of the notion of writing. It's a way of upsetting another set of hierarchies; but that upset is always an interim strategy. It's never absolute, complete, total, or finished.

TATSUMI: *Insofar as the cyborg is the product of the prosthetic--or, in Derridan terms, that writing itself must be the product of a prosthetic process--there's still controversy going on over whether cyberpunk is a movement or a subgenre. But, for the time being, we can at least say cyberpunks have clarified their consciousness of the history of science fiction, as it's seen in Gibson's story "The Gernsback Continuum," and Sterling's essay "Midnight on the Rue Jules Verne" [SF EYE #1].*

Gibson decomposes Gernsback by mocking his aethetics of the streamlined, whereas Sterling decomposes Verne by reconstructing his image from a punkish viewpoint. How do you place them in the history of science fiction, actually in view of the age of the New Wave? Perhaps the image of "cyberspace" might be another version of "inner space."

DELANY: Inner space . . . ?

Certainly that's a tempting reading.

But looking back on it at this point, "inner space" seems to me to have begun as a very conservative notion whose main strategic function was to legitimate science fiction for the New Wave--to make SF look more like literature by overtly importing into it the literary priority of the subject. To say that all the technological paraphernalia and images in SF were really keys to the socially, biologically, and cybernetically internalized world of the post-Romantic, post-Freudian "subject" was to throw out (or at least to repress) precisely what was important, significant, and truly alive in science fiction. It was a way to give up all articulate readerly (and writerly) response to just what, in science fiction, could critique that social, biological, cybernetic construction of the subjective: the playful presentation of a socially and scientifically analyzable, linguistically and poetically malleable object.

"It's not quite clear whether you're the one wearing the mirrorshades or whether the text is wearing them. I think in Cyberpunk the text is wearing them."

Writers who espoused inner space had to be, almost by definition--no?--anti-technology.

Cyberpunk is pro-tech. Thus it *can't* be pro-inner space, QED . . . ?

Excepting the rather silly film that, this past year, gave a biological literalness to the term, "inner space" was wholly psychological in its constitution, its function, in its deployment--at least during the period of its use as a critical term by the New Wave. First off, no one ever went there. It was an insistently aspacial term (what was spacious about it was also wholly ironic). It was a space of interpretation. It was occasionally indicated in the text; but it was never pictured and dramatized.

Cyberspace is, on the contrary, apsychological. It is the place we go to learn about information. Within it, we can gaze out (not in) on General Motors and see just how much bigger it is, in terms of what it knows, than the data base on the PC in the apartment next door. In it, we can destroy each other (Chrome can be burned down to its informational grounding) or we can die. Cyberspace exists entirely as a technological consensus. Without that technology it could not exist, be entered, or function. It's much closer to Popper's notion of "World-3" (the world of texts and data that interweaves and stabilizes the world of human beings) or Chardin's "Noösphere" (the sphere of abstract knowledges presumed to be generated by, and encircling, the biosphere) than it is to anything internal and psychological. Indeed, successive technological realizations of those and like images have organized the nostalgia, or the ravenous hunger, for the informational totality the bourgeoisie has experienced since the middle of the 19th Century--a nostalgia, a hunger implicit in everything from the Love of Wise Old Men (like Gandalf) to the ascendancy of computers themselves as middle class toys, a nostalgia which catapulted writers like Verne and, later, Wells (they were known, first of all, both of them, as writers who *knew* so much; Wells, indeed, was probably the first intellectual--as opposed to artist--celebrity; after all, his best creative work was *merely* science fiction; and as soon as he reached that celebrated position, he was invited to write a history of the world--which invitation he accepted and did pretty well at, everything considered) to an astonishing public popularity. Wells, for a while, was simply the most famous man in the world. That same hunger doubtless propels, now and again, the current extrageneric bourgeois interest in some aspect of science fiction, once it's been labeled with a catchy enough term.

How does one place the cyberpunks, then, against the New Wave? I don't know whether one can. There was the New Wave. Then there was the entire explosion of feminist science fiction--in many ways a political and stylistic counterwave. The cyberpunks come after that--again, in many ways a reaction.

Jeanne Gomoll has brought it specifically to our notice in her open letter to Joanna Russ, in the last issue of *Janus*. It's interesting that the feminist explosion--which obviously infiltrates the cyberpunk writers so much--is the one they seem to be the least comfortable with, even though it's one that, much more than the New Wave, has influenced them most strongly, both in progressive and in reactionary ways--progressive in its political cynicism, reactionary to the extent that cynicism can only be expressed through a return to a certain kind of macho rhetoric that was dated by 1960, and that really belongs to Britain's "Angry Young Men," Philip Wylie, and a whole lot of other--let's face it--second-rate writers. Yet, in characters like Molly . . . you know, the great irony of the cyberpunk movement is that the most quintessentially cyberpunk story is Connie Willis' "All My Darling Daughters." And Willis is very seldom--or never--thought of as a cyberpunk. Yet, if you wanted to choose one story that is more cyberpunk than any other one written, that would probably be it--and it's written outside the movement, and probably six or seven years before it even got going!

TATSUMI: *One thing that pleased me most in your class was your discussion of Alfred Bester, then John Varley, then William Gibson. If we are taking the viewpoint of cyberpunk, I think it is possible to reconstruct the American history of science fiction, beginning with Bester, Chip Delany, John Varley, and William Gibson.*

DELANY: Well, again, you're indulging that same cyberpunk patriarchal nervousness. You're omitting the Russ/Le Guin/ McIntyre/Vinge axis, without which there wouldn't *be* any cyberpunk. Is it this macho uncertainty that keeps on trying to make us black out the explosion that lights the whole cyberpunk movement? without which we wouldn't be able to read it? without which there would not be either the returning macho *or* the female cyberpunk characters who stand up to it?

When you look at the criticism cyberpunk has generated, you notice among the male critics this endless, anxious search for fathers--that finally just indicates the general male discomfort with the whole notion of paternity. Which, in cyberpunk, is as it should be. Cyberpunk is, at basis, a bastard form of writing. It doesn't have a father. Or, rather, it has so many that enumerating them just doesn't mean anything.

What it's got are mothers. A whole set of them--who, in literary terms, were so promiscuous that their cyberpunk offspring will simply never be able to settle down, sure of a certain daddy.

I'm a favorite faggot "uncle," who's always looked out for mom and who, when they were young, showed the kids some magic tricks. But I have no more claim to a position on the direct line

of descent than any other male writer. Sometimes they like to fantasize I do. But that's just because they used to like me before they knew anything about real sex.

To the extent that they can accept mom and their bastard status--which I think Gibson does--these writers produce some profoundly interesting and elegant work.

To the extent they rebel against them--and the one point Gomoll couldn't seem to make was that this search for fathers is part of the *same* legitimating move that ignores mothers--the work becomes at its best conservative and at its worst rhubarbative--if not downright tedious.

But movements are always controlled by such ironies. They never quite contain themselves. They're never wholly at one, at rest, at any kind of balance point with their own, always imposed from the outside identities: the Name-of-the-Father that never quite fits. That's what bastardy in such a context means. As long as we keep those ironies in mind, we have a strategy to keep the term cyberpunk from settling down, from congealing, from totalizing into something rigid and restrictive--we can keep it "under erasure," if you like.

TATSUMI: *A cyberpunk writer like John Shirley is not so feminist.*

DELANY: He represents, I think, a more macho aspect of the movement--and perhaps, at least in his fiction (his criticism is something else), one of the less interesting aspects, only partially because of it. But I admit: I haven't read any of the *Eclipse* trilogy yet. That might change my mind entirely. And his ideas on the place of politics in art are some of the most interesting--and intelligent--I've heard in years.

Intriguingly, the writer whose work has been pulled forward and placed at the head of it all--Gibson--is the one who most responds to the recent (and by no means completed) feminist history of our genre, and in an extraordinarily creative way--in a way similar to the way that Varley (who is the most non-cyberpunk writer you could have) responds to it, too. Shirley and Sterling might take a lesson. The simple truth has been that the test of the novel is always in the crafting of its female characters, from *Daniel Deronda* and *Great Expectations* to *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary,* from *Women in Love* to *The Waves* and *Nightwood.* For better or worse, science fiction novels are--yes--novels. *Ulysses* would be as impoverished without Joyce's Molly as *Neuromancer* would be without Gibson's.

And because we all learn to write fiction first and foremost from other fiction, neither men writers nor women are granted an *a priori* easier time. The problem of creating believable--much less good or great--women characters is not a jot easier for women writers than for men.

That's why, finally, it's a fair test, too.

TATSUMI: *I suppose a kind of male--or macho--tradition seems to be, for better or worse, what "historical consciousness" actually is.*

DELANY: If that's true, it's very sad. Bruce Sterling is a dazzlingly astute--and joyfully inventive--critic. Truly, I envy him the insights he can pull out from the most cursory survey of current social textures. Still, the one place he too much resembles the literary critics from whom his own rhetoric again and again tries to dissociate him is in his fear of the political.

It goes along with the cynicism. It begins as an attempt to keep the cynical stance pure; to keep its ironies exerting equal pressure in all directions. But quickly any critic worth his salt (and I use 'his' here advisedly, though conservative women critics--Helen Vendler, for example--suffer from it just as much) sees that, without some political leavening, that cynicism is already at work for some very ugly (and ideologically determined) ends; ends that are just as political as *The New York Times* editorial page and probably much nastier.

Sometimes the critic senses it, but hopes no one else will. That's just bad faith. We cease to take such critics at all seriously as soon as we notice. At other times, the critic begins to fight against his own blindness, against his own all too easy assertations, his areas of slovenly thought, his own conceptual bad habits.

Then we get some exciting work.

The conscious critico/political fear is that if you let the political--or the social--into your literary purview just the least little bit, it will get out of hand, take over everything, and render the enterprise trivial and hopelessly vulgar in a truly pernicious way.

What critics who have this fear (and it's a particularly American one, by the bye) don't--or won't--realize is that only by inviting the social--the political--into critical studies gracefully and graciously right at the beginning is there any hope of making it behave itself once it's inside, making it keep its feet off the coffee table or giving everybody a chance to talk without boorishly hogging the conversation. And, no, it will never learn which fork to use nor be sure when and when not to use its napkin. But, as hosts, we must make allowances--which is not to let the reins of the party go, but to keep a clear vision of our own priorities, while not forgetting that running *this* soirèe is work!

Critics who think they are abolishing the social--or the political--completely from their criticism are simply revealing their vast and overwhelming nostalgia for an era when criticism was seen (it never really was) as a much easier job than it is. We either articulate our politics; or we cleave to a very conservative politics.

The conservative streak in the range of sympathetic cyberpunk criticism is disturbing. That streak is most likely the one through which the movement will be co-opted to support the most stationary of status quos.

TATSUMI: *Bruce Sterling's and Lewis Shiner's "Mozart in Mirrorshades" not only decomposes Mozart but develops a concept of cybertime. How do you find the topic of temporality useful in science fiction?*

Maybe we've been focusing on the topic of space, and we didn't have any concept of inner time. We had only inner space.

DELANY: The involutions of time in science fiction are in general very primitive. Even in stories like "By His Bootstraps" and "All You Zombies," the thrust is constantly toward linearizing time--toward taking something that initially seems like a knot and declaring that somehow it's linearly negotiable. With the time knots--the temporal complexities that science fiction presents--there's always a sense that they're being untied by the plot. I think it's interesting that for the longest time in science fiction, during the Fifties and even the early Sixties, when somebody said you were writing an experimental story, they meant you'd written a story with a flashback in it! This was the height of literary experimentation! (This simple-mindedness was what the New Wave was originally rebelling against.) I think this was indicative of a general attitude toward time. How else to specify it, I'm not exactly sure. In *Parsifal,* Wagner has Gurnemanz (I think) say the line: "Here we are turning time into space."

And that may just be what science fiction, because of its commitment to narrative--and to a fairly simple concept of narrative at that--is condemned to: to take temporal complexities and dramatize them in simple spacial, and often inadequate, terms. At its best, such as the Burning Man we've already mentioned in Bester, it can be stunningly effective.

But cyberpunk (if not science fiction itself) has got the same problem that so many of us postmoderns are stuck with. It isn't sure whether it's a sexy bastard like Oedipus who knows all the answers--or an innocent bastard like Parsifal who can't come up with the questions.

As we live day to day, we pass through a very complex set of temporal intersections, yet somehow science fiction is always simplifying these, giving up on them, and there doesn't seem to be any way to fight it. I think it has something to do with the time-bound context that narrative takes place in. Somehow, there's a feeling in SF that if the temporality is really lost, even for a moment, then we don't *have* a narrative anymore. We have something else. We have a verbal construct.

And as we've said: verbal constructs in SF are usually at the service of those paraspaces. They avoid all entanglements in the temporal complexes that literature has used them to represent since the beginning of High Modernism.

Science fiction--and that's the current cutting edge of science fiction--seems to be committed to narrative in a very simplistic way. Gibson even glories in that simplicity. But it still sounds reactionary to me. I'm afraid there's nothing in cyberpunk I've seen to date that's spoken to the problem of temporal complexity in a way that strikes me as different from anything else in science fiction. If there had been, it might not be so popular.

TATSUMI: *Do you like any other cyberpunk stories, say, among the ones included in the* Mirrorshades *anthology?*

DELANY: I like most of them very much. I think "The 400 Boys," the Marc Laidlaw story, is very good. I like the Pat Cadigan story, "Rock On." I think it's a very good anthology, all the way through. There're stories that make me kind of wonder what they're doing here, like Greg Bear's. At the same time, it opens the thing up in an interesting way. I absolutely understand why Sterling didn't include, say, "Johnny Mnemonic" among the Gibson offerings. But I still wish it was there--and, in ten years, I think people will miss it. As I said, I just wonder why "All My Darling Daughters" isn't the book's lead story.

You know, I was doing free-lance work for Arbor House last summer, and I pretty much wrote all the copy on the jacket and collected the quotes. If you want, you can call me a recent cyberpunk packager.

TATSUMI: *Greg Bear refuses to be called a cyberpunk.*

DELANY: The problem with that is simply that you can't "refuse to be called" anything. You can only refuse to respond to the call. What you're called never has anything to do with you. It does, however, have a great deal to do with how you're talked about--which has a great deal to do with how you're treated. And how you're treated has everything to do with you.

That's one reason why you better not refuse to respond, but fight for better treatment--for you and all the other bastards.

TATSUMI: *In a recent issue of the rock magazine* Spin, *Dr. Timothy Leary writes an essay called "Cyberpunk."*

DELANY: Oh, did he? I haven't seen that.

TATSUMI: *In that essay, he says that Gibson not only fuses high tech with low life, but high tech with high art. Certainly his second novel,* Count Zero, *borrows that aesthetic image of "the box" from Joseph Cornell. Here's another prosthetic. And it records the fact that some people try to reconstruct science fiction in the context of modernism, I mean their sense of science fiction.*

In general, what do you make of such prosthetic possibilities in terms of your critical position that science fiction cannot be defined?

DELANY: Just because it can't be defined doesn't mean it can't be described.

It can be described. It can be located. You just can't specify its necessary and sufficient conditions, which is what a definition--by definition--must do.

TATSUMI: *And it can be grafted--can be combined with something else.*

DELANY: Of course.

TATSUMI: *That's very interesting. Though it can't be defined, it can--always--be combined.*

DELANY: You might argue that it is always-already combined with something else. Genres never arrive pure. They are always-already impure by their nature. And science fiction is one of the most impure. That indeed is half its glory. Science fiction has always looked around and absorbed images from art and science, and it's done both constantly--Ballard taking all the images from Yves Tanguy and Dali with one hand and images from the space program with the other. It's a process that happens again and again in the field. In that sense, I think, *Count Zero* is a very traditional science fiction novel--and beautifully so.

TATSUMI: *Gibson's sense of language itself seems prosthetic, as is typically manifested in his coinage "Neuromancer"--a combination of neurotic and necromancer (and a pun on and new romance). But it is you who have been best known for grafting various terms.*

I find it quite impressive that at several universities, including Cornell, you've been using the language of science fiction, which often rejects generic distinctions, and the language of teaching, which always starts with generic distinctions. Don't you find the combination of science fiction and teaching very . . . prosthetic?

DELANY: One of the delights of teaching science fiction is that not a great deal of it has been done, so you're really in a new field. Thus I think it behooves one when teaching science fiction to move slowly. The difficulty is having to bring the vocabulary of literary criticism to science fiction with great care; to remember that you're taking a vocabulary vouchsafed by literary studies and moving it outside the literary precinct. You have to proceed very, very carefully. It involves critiquing literary studies themselves, as you appropriate one term after another--or as you decide that you can appropriate this term but that you can't appropriate that one. It's been my experience, for example, that when you deconstruct (to use a common, current term) a science fiction text, you indulge a very different operation from the one you indulge when you deconstruct a literary text--a text of naturalistic fiction, poetry, or philosophy.

In science fiction the undecidable (or the deconstructable) is always organized around this question: Is the particular phrase you're trying to read closely a piece of information telling you about the fictive subject, or is it a phrase telling you about the object structure of the fictive world? Most competent SF readers carry an innate sense that a term, phrase, or sentence can't do both--or at least not both at the same time. So this is what becomes radically undecidable in the science fiction text.

An example I've used frequently: in Thomas Disch's story "Angouleme," there's a character named "Miss Kraus." This is a story that takes place in June and July of 2024. Miss Kraus in the story walks around in Battery Park with a crackpot placard protesting the destruction of seagulls. Now when Disch wrote the story in April of 1970, there was a real woman in New York City whose name was Miss Kraus. She went around the streets with various placards--just as does the character in the story taking place in 2024. At least once the real Miss Kraus was the subject of a small *Village Voice* article.

One recalls Tolstoy getting the idea for *Anna Karenina* from the article on the railroad suicide of an unknown Russian woman. But notice what different problems of interpretation this leads to with the SF text.

Do you extrapolate from Disch's narrative that his fictive "Miss Kraus" in 2024 knew about the real Miss Kraus in 1970, that, somewhere, she'd read the old *Village Voice* piece and taken her name consciously from her avatar? Disch tells us clearly in the text that, because of her wedding ring (a sign that she's really a Mrs.) "Miss Kraus" can't be her real name. Does this society offer its ordinary citizens this sort of access to the details of its own past . . . and the writer's present?

But perhaps it's simply a poetic borrowing from the real world of 1970, grafted onto the text, to stand as another sort of sign--a sign outside the world of the story, a sign that merely floats, as it were, on the textual surface, without intruding into the implied structure of the narrative world--to alert (to gesture or merely to indicate for) the allusionarily and historically informed reader what sort of crackpot the story's Miss Kraus, in fact, is.

Where inbetween are we supposed to read? To what degree is the sign merely textual, and to what degree is it submerged within the narrative, recomplicating it to suggest objective social conditions and occurring social incidents, choices and decisions belonging to the story's characters and world?

As a textual sign, is it merely an indicator of subject, or, within the story's narrated world, does it have an objective weight?

And why can't it be both?

Well, if you read it one way, it says that Miss Kraus is historically aware, has a sense of irony and historical mission, however distorted. It says she is a creature of considered consciousness and conscientious resonance, who knows--and who has even constructed--where she comes from. And, above all, it says that the world of the story, however oppressive, offers her the possibility of this historical access.

If you read it the other way, however, it says exactly the opposite: it says that Miss Kraus is naive, simple, a textual configuration of poetic indications, taken from history, but that she is wholly unaware of it nor able to control it. It says that the possibility of historical access is ellided from the fictive world by the same rhetorical gesture of poesis that names and constitutes her.

But you can't really decide between the two readings.

There's nothing in the text that lets me know how I'm supposed to read this name "Miss Kraus" against the historical-*cum*-contemporary fact of the name's origin. Since there is a historical source for the name, does the character have access to this history or does only the writer? It's undecidable from the text.

To complete the deconstruction, of course, we would have to undo the ideological distinction; and that would require perusing the text for the other dozen places within the story where names are rendered inappropriate or ambiguous. But that is not our purpose here. We only want to indicate a beginning.

This is how we almost always have to begin the deconstruction of the SF text. This is the kind of thing that becomes undecidable in science fiction, which is very different--is a question you simply don't have--in naturalistic narratives. Now, in *Anna Karenina,* I believe Anna reads an article about a suicide. But no one reasonably asks whether Anna did or did not read the article that inspired her own creation--even if the words of the two articles were identical. Which is to say, the implied irony would always float on the surface of the text, a commentary upon it, but without ever becoming an element of the novel's objective world. If we took the sign as absorbed by (and contouring) the fictive world of the novel, it would render Tolstoy's text a kind of metafiction simply inconceivable among the realistic Russian novels of the 19th Century.

The temporal dimension of SF, however, makes it a very reasonable question to ask of "Miss Kraus." And that's where deconstructing the science fiction text takes us into entirely different historical (and ideological) questions from the deconstruction of literature.

TATSUMI: *Does that difference control your sense of teaching science fiction?*

DELANY: Yes. As we use words that are borrowed, very carefully, from literary studies in teaching science fiction, we end up going in radically different directions--directions that almost invariably take more cognizance of history . . . which is why I like to teach science fiction. ●

HYPERPRISM 21.5

You might not recognize *Xochiquetzal* as a spaceship. She bore little resemblance to the great membranous craft that arced to Jupiter and Saturn, the wood–en–hulled polyhedra that first travelled from the vicinity of Sol to Vulpecula, Monoceros, Fornex; to the scintillating force–shells that were used to penetrate the hearts of suns in the great days of solar research.

Xochiquetzal shimmered and strained as her great engines strove to deform the very space that held her. To any observer outside the influence of the ship's flux she seemed bathed in a rippling globe of darkness that drank in the radiant, ambient energy of her surroundings. This was the food that nourished her engines.

Within the ship it was quiet time. The sweat–ing engines had succeeded in crushing the space around *Xochiquetzal* to a hypothetical unitary point. The ship herself contracted with that space until, forced out of the ordinary dimensions of the ein–steinian plenum, she popped, like a slimy water–melon seed, into another place.

At the moment of transit the crew were divided between those duty–bound to attend to their functions and those who stared, fascinated, at the universe outside *Xochiquetzal.* The launching pad for the ship was a converted zeppelin–hangar covertly constructed by German Imperial Air Service troops and coolie laborers in Shantung Province during the winter of 1916–17.

To the crew of *Xochiquetzal* all that was visible was the glare of giant banks of multiple tensor–bulbs, flaring like gargantuan inverse fly–eyes. The sound of the ship's engines was a bizarre minor–key discord of near–subsonic rumblings and near–supersonic shrieks, the sound of a new Kraka–toa ribboned and rent by the scream of a mosquito magnified to the scale of a diploid plesiosaurus.

Then the engine–sound was overridden by a sharp crackling. The tensor–illumination disappeared. The white glare of the two–century–old zeppelin hangar was replaced by a blackness in which there burned rainbow afterimages of the tensors.

In *Xochiquetzal's* velvet–cushioned seraglio, off–duty crew–members sighed and commented briefly.

Jane+463066+Marple heaved a sigh and lifted a neural electrode with one muscular tentacle, looked around at playmate–fellows, slid the electrode home glowing vermillion to the tips as neurocurrents played over synapses.

Bending perilously, Moris–145678–Klaw winced pleasurably at the wave of frigidity that swept from Jane+463066+Marple. With vibrating channels blue–green serum puddled.

Yen–509148+Sin beat knuckles on the other two, raised tumescent pseudo–hellgrammites, rasped aloud a blasphemous line from the suppressed vol–ume of Paul Verlaine's *Poèmes Saturniens.* The words were converted to scent and wafted through the intravascular communion, causing stridulation, vertigo, mild nausea.

The common auditory centers of the crew–members were stunned by the searing central notes of Edgar Varèse's tone poem *Integrales,* universally recognized distress–signal and call for attention of extrasolar pilgrimages. Still maintaining their neural bond the crew members flowed through *Xochiquet–zal's* vascules, elongating optic neurons to assemble visually on the bridge of the ship.

Already there were *Xochiquetzal's* captain–quartermaster and the ship's two resident midship'n Caracara–01129+Kalvinii and Pankleb+1+Pankleb. Caracara–01129+Kalvinii trembled, frightened. The second midship'n, Pankleb+1+Pankleb, squat and quilted, exhaled visibly.

Captain Sedna+5+3+sed–Sebek revolved slowly on a command–disc visually indistinguishable from a Ragtime–era piano stool. Sedna+5+3+sed–Sebek ob–served the assembled crew and midship'n, revolving, thrusting bifurcated tongue ceilingward, flicking control signals to open and shut the innumerable microid light–gates that made up the ship's outer skin.

The captain–quartermaster ceased manipulating switches, left the light–gates open. Beyond the skin of *Xochiquetzal* the crew and midship'n could see the content of that new realm where *Xochiquetzal* swerved and danced like a reptilian ovum caught in the sluice–flow of a marine dam.

fiction by RICHARD A. LUPOFF

illustration by RICHARD POWERS

"Midship'n Caracara–01129+Kalvinii was on a watch at 01514 hours and sounded the alarm for external object sighting," Captain Quartermaster Sedna+5+3+sed–Sebek announced. The words pul–sated visibly in the multicolored atmosphere of the cabin. Jane+463066+Marple, Moris–145678–Klaw, Yen–509148+Sin shivered.

Midship'n Pankleb+1+Pankleb nodded approv–ingly, the gesture rippling a row of eyestalks and tentacles that ran the width of the midship'n's massive collarbone.

"Another plenum," Caracara–01129+Kalvinii announced, waving first one arm, then the other, sedulously toward the light–gated body–wall of *Xochiquetzal.* "Another plenum."

Xochiquetzal, cyborg–circuited clone–brain alert, chimed in a synthesized trombone–mellophone duet variation on Alan Hovhaness's *Khaldis.*

Moris–145678–Klaw, empathy–trained, ran pseudopods comfortingly across the ship's hypersen–sor board. The entire ship shuddered with pleasure, whipping external antennae like the tails of a litter of newborn samoyeds.

"How do you know it isn't merely our own plenum?" queried Yen–509148+Sin. "Our own plenum, viewed from outside? Perhaps in left–right reversal? Perhaps with time–flow contra–normal? Perhaps with electrical charges reversed from our viewpoint as we stand in fifth–dimensional isolation from all of Ninib's domain?'

Caracara–01129+Kalvinii hurled a radiant–energy globe that Yen–509148+Sin dodged, dissolved through *Xochiquetzal's* light–gated hull, spun into the nothingness beyond where it deployed, sea–urchinlike, into spikes of lethal frangibility. The neo–solaroid body, caught in the gravitic attraction of *Xochiquetzal,* rolled erratically around and around the ship, leaving its wavelike skin temporarily imprinted with rows of dimples.

"Look you!" hissed Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+sed–Sebek at the others. Eyestalks flow–ing through ship's tubes, they pressed against the light–gated ceiling. Beyond, whirling above the ship, turned glowing polychrome crystal, living stellar matter, gas–clouds and radiant solar–dust, hydrogens and metals.

"A plenum indeed," gasped Jane+463066+Marple.

"The midship'n is correct," thrummed Moris–145678–Klaw.

"My apologies," Yen–509148+Sin wept. Blobs of heliotrope jelly pulsated from dozens of orifices. The crew–member's body–mass dropped by more than two percent. Yen–509148+Sin struck heel of tentacle to brow, weeping.

"Accepted," Caracara–01129+Kalvinii throbbed.

"Ah," Yen–509148+Sin gulped in relief.

"Our task," Captain–quartermaster Sedna +5+3+sed–Sebek said, "is to explore to the extent of our capabilities and report back to headquarters of the Tellurium Realm at Rapa Nui our findings. What does this other plenum contain? Menace for Tellus? Room for expansion? Colony worlds? Allies? Intel–ligences capable of teaching us wonders and for–mulae undreamed by human intelligence? Billions of preternaturally innocent souls ripe for winning to the cause of Ninib? Minerals for import? Strange fruit? Drugs to elongate human life, increase human

intelligence, open us to illumination of ultimate problems and the reality of the final Plan?"

The captain–quartermaster turned on *Xochiquetzal's* command–disc. With a single lavender claw the officer reached, reached, as if to penetrate the very wall of *Xochiquetzal* as had Caracara–01129 +Kalvinii's illegally propelled radiant–energy globe. As if to reached across trillions of parsecs of unil–luminated vacuum to touch the stars and the plan–ets, the nebulae and the swarming meteors, that made up the sight above them.

"Rig for conventional transit," the captain trilled.

Crew and midship'n sprang to duty stations. The delicious pains of the seraglio were forgotten. The clashing music and the piercing scents, the rounded salts of communion, were for now no more.

The plenum overhead writhed and seethed as billions of galaxies threw dazzling bursts of alpha–radiation at *Xochiquetzal.* Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+sed–Sebek thrust a pseudo–tentacle into a command–circuit receptor. The captain ordered *Xochiquetzal's* cyborg–circuited clone–brain the initiate thruster sequence. The ship moaned, thrummed into activity, sang hypersonically in a synthesized chorus of ten thousand voices the high rondo from Britten's *The Burning Fiery Furnace.*

Yen–509148+Sin crept to the periphery of the ship's engine chamber. There Yen–509148+Sin spread every molecule in a thick, gelid foam over the vibrating machinery. The sensation of the engine's operation sent jabs of jagged salt–flavor through Yen–509148+Sin's total being.

"Close in, close in," the captain commanded. *Xochiquetzal* obeyed, spurting intermittently through the plenal porosity of fifthness. Through wide–open light–gates Pankleb+1+Pankleb watched the new universe expand and approach the ship. It was as if a hellgrammite, scuttering across the face of an anvil, looked up and saw the head of a sledge–hammer descending at breakneck speed.

Xochiquetzal rose toward the new plenum. Now the allness so filled the region above the ship's light–gated ceiling as to obliterate the blank void beyond. Coruscating colors wove and collided, scintillating and mingling, above the ship. The midship'n, unaccustomed to visions of such vastness, wept from banks of particolored eyes.

Galactic clusters appeared as *Xochiquetzal* rose. The ship's engines screamed oblately. Thrus–ters throbbed against nothingness that transcended mere vacuum as the slaughtered matter at the heart's–core of a singularity transcends ordinary neptunium or orichalc.

Glowing reflected yellow–green, *Xochiquetzal* flashed toward a great cluster. Billions of suns like dancing neutrinos formed patterns, shapes, organs. Great bands of matter like living creatures swept toward the ship. *Xochiquetzal's* cyborg–circuited clone–brain seized input circuitry, flashed to the captain–quartermaster, crew, midship'ni, the intro–duction to David Bedford's *The Tentacles of the Dark Nebula.*

"Stupid, naive, literal–minded cyberclone!" Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek extruded crocodilian jaws and snapped angrily at the ship. "Fool! Blithering unsubtlety!" The officer raised a massively jackbooted foot and drove it viciously into the ship's organo–sensor membrane.

Howling, *Xochiquetzal* raised its internal temperature until the captain and crew began to sizzle. Then the ship dropped the temperature back close to freezing, all the while increasing the volume of the Bedford composition until it was an indistinguishable, mind–filling roar in which every note, every syllable was lost in a total crescendo. From the Bedford, *Xochiquetzal* dropped its volume. To the auditors the overbearing roar became a mere painful scream, a throbbing, pounding noise, a hiss from which emerged a new melange of melodic material.

The ship pounded at them from all sides the strains of Charles Ives' composition *General Booth's Entrance into Heaven* overlaid with gales of hyster–ical laughter.

Without awaiting command from the captain–quartermaster, *Xochiquetzal* extruded a caterpillar–treaded claw. In the light of a billion burning suns the claw glittered a dull black.

"Closer, you mechanical pismire! Rapa Nui's picking up the tab for this nutty jaunt and we have to bring back something worth showing or we'll never get another appropriation!"

"Hokay, boss," the ship hissed.

"And can we please get some different music, *Xochiquetzal,*" Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek pleaded.

The ship dissolved from Ives into Johann Christian Bach's *Orion.*

"All right," sighed Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek. "You're still a literal–minded rascal, but at least I can concentrate with that stuff going. The other––whoosh!––takes both halves of both my brains just to keep up, and then who runs the ship?"

Who do you think, *Xochiquetzal* sublimed back.

"Let's get in there," Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek said softly.

Xochiquetzal responded.

They plunged into a massive tentacular ex–trusion of the spiral nebuloid cluster. Within were still galaxies. The ship spun a roulette circuit, randomized course, plunged erratically into thicker and ever thicker concentrations of stars.

From Jane+643066+Marple, the crew–member elongated into vermicellilike strands and distributed alongside the ship's conduit–system, pulsing pseudo–vocalizations throbbed: "Look over there! Put out your antennae."

"Go on," Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek commanded.

Xochiquetzal extended a web of monofilamental sensors four hundred trillion meters in all direc–tions. To an eye observing the ship, it was indistin–guishable from a fat–bellied spider throbbing in the center of a glittering web eight hundred trillion meters across.

"Listen!" Jane+643066+Marple hissed.

"I hear it, all right," *Xochiquetzal* sublimed.

"Hear what?" the captain demanded.

Xochiquetzal replied with a deafeningly laven–der rendition of Erik Satie's *Apercus Dèsagrèables,* the entire ship vibrating, one side in copper, the other in quicksilver. The ship entered subjective time–stasis until the piece was completed. Then *Xochiquetzal* rotated its antenna–web in a spiral scan until it was zeroed in on a point midway on the tentacular spiral arm.

The ship distributed its input to its occupants. The radiation was that of a complete dysonsphere.

Sounds of transmissions and waste radiation trickled from the mouths and bellies of the crew.

"Go!" Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek commanded.

Xochiquetzal accelerated in the direction of the radiant sphere.

The ship drew nearer to the sphere, its anten–na–web rotating slowly around it, continuing to pick up the radiation of the dysonsphere and relaying that radiation to the crew. Moris–145678–Klaw, Jane+643066+Marple and Yen–509148+Sin flowed back to the seraglio, filled a tank there with aera–ted hydrocarbon distillates, sheathed in one ano–ther's bodies, immersed themselves in the tank, raised its temperature to boiling, signalled the ship to pulsate the viscid fluid to the strains of Skria–bin's *Poem of Fire,* awaited the arrival of *Xochi–quetzal* at the dysonsphere.

The sphere was virtually invisible in conven–tional light spectra but stood brightly against the background of cosmic dust and distant objects when *Xochiquetzal* snapped on infrared sensors. The sphere captured the entire radiation of its sun, utilizing it as a solar collector of immense size; only surplus radiation, absorbed through the entire thickness of the sphere, was reradiated from its outer surface.

This, in turn, had attracted gigantic stellar parasites that flattened themselves against the outer surface of the dysonsphere, sucking at its wasted energy for their own nourishment.

As *Xochiquetzal* approached the sphere, a sector ten thousand meters in diameter glowed red, then white, then cooled. The flat parasites that covered the sector remained, crisped to a cinder. The sector of the dysonsphere vibrated until the cinders were tumbled away. The surface of the sphere rolled back and a fleet of glittering onyx needles sped outward. Instantly pseudopods thou–sands of meters in length rose from the parasites surrounding the hole.

The needles flashed evasively. Some of them were caught by the pseudopods and dragged down to the outer surface of the sphere where they were smashed, cracked open, their occupants dragged out and devoured like the tender meat of so many succulent oysters.

The opening in the dysonsphere rolled shut.

The surviving needles flashed away through interstellar vacuum.

Xochiquetzal radiated identifying codes toward the dysonsphere, focusing the broadcast on the sector whence the needles had emerged.

No reply was received.

The ship reeled in its antenna–net, plunged downward, reconfigured as a conic nautilus–shell, struck the dysonsphere whirling at forty–two thou–sand, seven hundred fifty–five revolutions per metric minute. The flat parasites had already reoc–cupied the reclosed sector of dysonsphere surface. *Xochiquetzal* slashed through parasites, sending blood spurting, flesh writhing away in pain–tropism. The nautilus–tip of *Xochiquetzal* bit into the hard material of the sphere itself. The ship burst into a joyous rendition of Don Gillis' *Tulsa––a Symphonic Portrait in Oils.*

Plugging a quivering tentacle into each and every ear, Captain–quartermaster Sedna+5+3+Sed–Sebek moaned, "Oh Ninib, *Xochiquetzal,* when we get back to Shantung I'm going to have your mem–ory blown away and filled with cooking hints in–stead of that Belit–blasted catalog of sonic syrup you inflict on us!"

The ship muted the Gillis composition.

Through *Xochiquetzal's* light–gates, crew and

midship'ni could observe the girders and beams, the stanchions and the circuits that filled the shell of the dysonsphere. *Xochiquetzal* plunged onward. Spatial orientation became first confused, then almost meaningless. Up and down had ceased to possess significance. There was only a vector line running from the ship's point of entry into the shell, to its hypothetical point of emergence inside the sphere.

Behind *Xochiquetzal,* self-actuating repair mechanisms restored damaged components of the dysonsphere shell.

Like a car seeking the great stone of Sardis, *Xochiquetzal* broke through the shell, its tip whirring freely in the air that clung to the inner surface of the sphere, held there by the centrifugal force of the sphere's rotation.

Triumphantly, *Xochiquetzal* broke into the final movement of the original version of Mahler's first symphony. "A sudden outcry from a deeply wounded heart," the ship tight-beamed to Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek.

"You bastard," said the captain.

"Satisfied?" the ship demanded.

"At least it isn't your usual loony tunes and merry melodies! Turn us, now, and we'll discuss music some other time."

Xochiquetzal extruded tracks once again. As the ship's prow emerged fully from the ground, the tracks dragged it to a horizontal position. Without waiting to be told, *Xochiquetzal* tested the environment. Data were fed back to the crew. They reconfigured, adapted body chemistry to fit the surroundings of the ship.

"You first," the captain indicated Midship'n Pankleb+1+Pankleb.

Looking vaguely like an oversized squid, the midship'n filled its body-sac with buoyant gases and scampered through *Xochiquetzal's* exit-port. Even the view of the inside of this world possible through *Xochiquetzal's* light-gates was as nothing compared to the vista Pankleb+1+Pankleb beheld.

The midship'n's attention was caught first by the sun--or rather, by the solar cluster--overhead. Instead of a single star, the dysonsphere had been constructed around a complex system of sunlets that wove about one another even as Pankleb+1+Pankleb gazed up at them. Each was of a different color: red, blue, yellow, green, even what seemed to be a black star!

The black sun, Pankleb+1+Pankleb postulated, must be radiating in the ultraviolet range. The midship'n looked down at the ground where dozens of squid-like tentacles trailed comfortably across soft grasses. As the giant cluster of sunlets danced overhead like atoms in an animated molecular model, so shadows of complementary colors danced and tumbled across the grass.

A soft wind carried sweet scents to the midship'n's sensitive nostrils.

Sounds of life filled the air. Sounds that resembled but were not exactly the rustle of palm fronds, the call of birds, the roar of great beasts.

Using tentacles as flagellae to send the squid-like body skimming across the tops of the grass, Midship'n Pankleb+1+Pankleb sped over the ground. The atmosphere was transparent but not quite invisible. Where clusters of cloud or banks of fog might make patches of white and gray on Earth, here wisps of atmospheric gasses shimmered from tint to tint in the never-ceasing luminescence of the whirling sunlets.

Nearing a stand of woods, Pankleb+1+Pankleb was startled to observe what appeared to be a medieval procession emerging from beneath the trees. Foot-soldiers came first, wearing soft motley and carrying wooden staffs, bows slung over their shoulders and quivers of arrows hanging across their backs.

Following the cloth-clad infantry came mounted warriors covered in chain-mail, then colorfully garbed functionaries in garments of crimson, aquamarine, dazzling white. And finally, at the center of the procession, followed again by declining ranks of functionaries, knights, and infantry, a royal couple in splendid robes studded with precious stones.

Pankleb+1+Pankleb blinked, rubbed squid-eyes with tentacle tips, vented enough buoyant gas to make the squid-body sink down into the dysonsphere's grass so that the approaching party would detect no unexpected presence. Safely concealed in the tall grass, Pankleb+1+Pankleb reconfigured to human appearance, synthesizing a sparkling, brilliant dress uniform of a midship'n of the Space Force of the Tellurian Realm.

As the head of the travelling party drew past the spot where Pankleb+1+Pankleb crouched in concealment, the midship'n stood up tall and proud in the bright sunlight. This, Pankleb+1+Pankleb realized, would be crucial to making a successful career in the Space Force. Botch what amounted to a first contact assignment and you were marked for life. But bring it off to the mutual advantage of the Tellurian Realm and the aliens, and you were made.

Radiating in Universal Thought Trans, Pankleb +1+Pankleb spoke aloud in Rapa Nuian. "Greetings!"

The lead infantry troops stopped short, staring. They were impressed by the glittering brass and bright colors of the Tellurian Space Force uniform. That was obvious. They were also suspicious, and--Pankleb+1+Pankleb scanned their minds for willingness to bring their weapons into play, and found them eminently willing--dangerous if they took the midship'n for an enemy.

Pankleb+1+Pankleb could of course reconfigure into a form that would permit escape. Or into an organic tank that would withstand any simple weapon wielded by the likes of these. But if the midship'n could avoid the necessity of reconfiguring, could be taken by these natives for a fellow human, contact would be established far more quickly and favorably than otherwise.

The leading infantry troops were standing uncertainly, balancing their jousting staffs, scanning the newcomer.

"Who is your commander?" the midship'n demanded.

"Ah, aye, yoor highness," the nearest soldier said. "'Ere, Barnival," the soldier turned to the nearest companion standing at one side, "best call a Sir or Lady to talk to this furr'ner."

The second infantry soldier scampered back, exchanged whispered words and wary glances over one shoulder, the latter directed toward Pankleb+1+Pankleb.

A mustachioed and chain-mailed knight spurred his mount toward Pankleb+1+Pankleb. For the first time the latter noted that the mounted natives rode not horses, but some sort of mutated flightless birds.

"Are you the senior person present?" Pankleb +1+Pankleb demanded.

"I am Grand Duke Sir Perr'l Monmorencey," the latter replied. "And you, stranger? Afoot as you are, you can hardly be a personage of importance."

Pankleb+1+Pankleb smiled ingratiatingly. "I travel by mechanical contrivance, not on the back of a bird!" The midship'n pointed over one shoulder, vaguely in the direction of *Xochiquetzal.*

"Do you now?" Grand Duke Sir Perr'l Monmorencey stared at Pankleb+1+Pankleb. The midship'n radiated soothing waves, scaled up the human body before Monmorencey's eyes, doing so gradually and subtly so as to become increasingly impressive without startling the other.

Monmorencey rubbed his eyes. "Wait here." Pankleb+1+Pankleb continued to grow. Monmorencey wheeled his flightless bird and trotted off to confer with the royal couple and their surrounding courtiers. Pankleb+1+Pankleb stood patiently, radiating waves at Monmorencey and the others, working to gain their trust.

Finally the Grand Duke gestured to Pankleb+1 +Pankleb. The midship'n, now nearly three meters tall, strode confidently toward the gathered functionaries. The suns glittered and sparkled on the Tellurian Realm Space Force uniform. Reaching the outer ring of luridly robed retainers, Pankleb+1+Pankleb constructed a flight of force-stairs and climbed them over the heads of the men and women. Reaching the top of the stairs, the midship'n extended a force-ramp forward and walked regally to its end.

Then, dangling two feet shod in flashing black boots and white uniform jodhpurs, the midship'n sat casually on the edge of the force-ramp.

The royal couple below, still mounted on their flightless birds, turned astonished eyes upward. One of the younger and more eager of the royal retainers panicked and loosed an arrow at Pankleb+1 +Pankleb. The midship'n, retaining fully the human configuration assumed for this encounter, merely by speeding up reflexes dodged as the arrow reached the level of the force-ramp, reached out one white-gauntleted hand, caught the arrow at mid-shaft and flipped it earthward with a flawless mumbledepegger's snap of the wrist. The arrow struck the ground, quivered and stood upright.

Pankleb+1+Pankleb wondered whether *Xochiquetzal* was monitoring this little expedition and the midship'n's encounter with the travelling natives. In immediate response the midship'n picked up *Xochiquetzal's* subliminal rendition of John Carpenter's *Improving Songs for Anxious Children.*

"Bring one of 'em back if you can," Captain Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek's voice wove through the ship's melodies.

A metric hour later, Midship'n Pankleb+1+Pankleb arrived back at *Xochiquetzal,* Grand Duke Sir Perr'l Monmorencey in tow. The Grand Duke had refused to accept Pankleb+1+Pankleb as an equal, considering that the latter was dismounted, but Pankleb+1+Pankleb got Monmorencey to come along by extending the force platform all the way back to *Xochiquetzal,* walking along over the Duke's head while the Duke rode his giant bird through the tall grass. *Xochiquetzal* welcomed them back with a silent rendition of Bradshaw's *Bockhockids of Atvatabar.*

Monmorencey was reluctant to leave his bird outside, but the captain convinced him that the bird could come inside, too, and shortly they were both frozen up in *Xochiquetzal's* stasis-chamber while

neural scanners read out the contents of their brains. The bird had more to tell than was expected, and the Duke less, but it was still pretty useful stuff.

Within another metric half-hour, *Xochiquetzal* sprouted temporary wings and propellers, and in the guise of a Boeing Y1B-9 bomber was skimming over the castles and forests of the dysonsphere.

The Boeing's engines, extruded by *Xochiquetzal,* drew power directly from the spaceship's power-plant. The roaring of the old Curtiss Conquerors was synthesized and broadcast through speakers concealed in the extruded nacelles.

The *Xochiquetzal*/Y1B-9 reached the end of the forest, passed over a rocky escarpment and roared through high-hanging fog banks above a wave-crested ocean. The captain-quartermaster, crew-members and midship'ni, getting into the spirit of disguise, configured as Eugene Bullard, Amelia Earhart, Helene Dutrieu, Harriet Quimby, Etienne Oehmichen. All wore leather flying suits, soft helmets, tinted goggles, silken scarves, high-laced boots, padded gloves.

A thousand kilometers out to sea the Boeing passed over a rocky island covered with optical telescopes and microwave dishes. Harriet Quimby, piloting the Boeing, spoke to its cybrain.

"Any way we can land there?"

"Sure," the Boeing replied. "Just hang on, kiddies!" *Xochiquetzal* reconfigured as a Savoia-Marchetti S-55 twin-hulled flying boat. Fiat radials roaring, the Savoia-Marchetti swung around the island while its crew took observations.

Etienne Oehmichen, operating the flying boat's radio apparatus, tapped out a request in International Morse. Back came landing instructions and navigation data for a concealed channel that led into the island's subterranean hangar.

Oehmichen relayed the info to Harriet Quimby. She took the Savoia-Marchetti in low, under the fog, cut back the engines so the flying boat air-stalled just as the waves slapped at the bottoms of her twin hulls. Then Quimby gunned the engines again and pulled the reconfigured *Xochiquetzal* beneath moss-coated granite.

A lab assistant greeted the aviators and escorted them up through the dank stone staircases to the glistening modern laboratory that dominated the island. There they were greeted by the chief scientist of the installation, Dr. Thaddeus Bodog Sivana, a small, bald-pated man with glittering spectacles and prominent teeth. He wore sparkling laboratory whites and extended a soft pink hand to each visitor in turn.

"Where have you come from?" Sivana inquired.

Helene Dutrieu, speaking French and radiating in Universal, explained their origins on Earth, in Shantung Province of China, and briefed Sivana on the mission of *Xochiquetzal.*

Sivana listened intently, then said, "I suppose you want to know where you are, what kind of world this is."

Dutrieu nodded.

"You know already this is an artificial sphere completely enveloping the solar cluster." He pointed vaguely upward. "We don't know who built the thing, or how. When--probably on the order of fifteen billion years ago. Lot of civilizations have risen and rotted away in this world. The place you just came from sounds like Prince Valiant's realm. Lot of traffic through there. Everybody who wanders through pretends that nobody else was ever there. *Heh-heh-heh!"*

"What about those black needlelike objects--they must have been spaceships--we saw leaving the sphere just as we arrived?"

Sivana looked serious. "Yep. That's what they were. Helped design the things myself. In fact, you might say they're my babies. Mission planning, though, that was my friend Lex Luthor's work."

"How can we reach him?"

"If you want to see him, you'll have one helluva jaunt. His shop's right across the sphere from mine. I've got a couple of relay satellites up there, can microwave a message to Lex for you in a few minutes."

Dutrieu grinned. "Not to worry, *mon vieux.* Our good ship *Xochiquetzal* . . ."

" . . . you mean that screwy flying boat?"

" . . . can make it through those little bonfires and we won't even break a sweat!"

"Vraiment?" Sivana said.

"Mes oui."

"Listen, my daughter Georgia has wanted to visit Lex for a long time, and didn't feel like the long trek. Do you think you'd have room for a passenger?"

"Certainment!"

Sivana microwaved Luthor. The five aviators and Sivana's scrawny daughter Georgia climbed aboard the Savoia-Marchetti and taxied out through the underground channel. Once they hit the open sea, the plane gunned its Fiat engines, rose into the fog-banks; the aviators played a mildly dirty trick on Georgia Sivana and stuck her in stasis with Sir Perr'l Monmorencey,

Xochiquetzal pulled in its wings, reabsorbed twin hulls and twin Fiat engines, reconfigured as its original rivet-clad iron-bodied self, set refrigeration units to work, ignited power-plants and curved straight toward the solar-cluster, thrusters flaming, bleating *Also Sprach Zarathustra* at the top of its synthetic voice.

"Oh, for Nusku's sake, *Xochi!"* Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek grew a full coating of long, stiff hair, then tore it out by the roots using dozens of pincer-edged claws. "Is it silly symphonies time again?"

"You got no soul, Sedna," *Xochiquetzal* grumbled. But *Xochiquetzal* faded the music right after the "Dwellers of the Back-World" section, segued into Malcolm Williamson's *The Glitter Gang.*

"You really like that guy, don't you? Oh well, it's better than some of the marshmallows you bombard us with." Captain-quartermaster Sedna +5+3+Sed-Sebek turned from quarreling with the ship's brain and went back to work. Directing *Xochiquetzal* through a cluster of dancing sunlets wasn't the easiest of tasks.

There was a heavy demand on the ship's refrigeration capacity. In fact, crew and midship'ni were dumped into stasis for a period of transit, so *Xochiquetzal* only had to keep Captain Sedna+5+3 +Sed-Sebek cool.

Then there was the matter of gravitic stress. A batch of constantly dancing stars, whirling about one another as well as a common center of gravity, the whole massive configuration suspended in the center of a dysonsphere some hundred million kilometers in diameter and equalling a substantial fraction of the cumulative mass of those stars, involved dealing with a steadily varying complex of tugs that could have torn a spaceship apart if the ship hadn't been as strong and intelligent as *Xochiquetzal,* and captained by someone as capable as Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek.

They came through safely, and as *Xochiquetzal* settled onto the rooftop receiving pad of Lex Luthor's laboratory, the captain asked the ship to turn off its stasis field and reactivate crew, midship'ni, and passengers. *Xochiquetzal* obliged with alacrity.

Meanwhile the ship had reconfigured as a Sikorsky *Ilia Mourometz* biplane. "What in hell are you doing now?" the captain demanded. *Xochiquetzal* extruded a three-dimensional viewscreen and gave Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek a good look at its struts and braces, its four Argus engines with their whirling wooden props, its complex of rectangular cabin windows with Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek inside staring, appalled, at the screen.

Xochiquetzal hummed the opening bars of Ferde Grofès *Aviation Suite.* Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek turned into a blue lobster, then a giant green hornet, then a more-or-less human being again. There seemed nothing to say.

In Lex Luthor's laboratory, that luminary explained that he had indeed created the fleet of black glittering needlecraft the space-travellers had spotted leaving the dysonsphere. "Ironic that they should depart just as you arrived. But at least on your own way out of here--I assume that you'll want to be leaving us--you won't have to bore through the sphere again. In fact, it was the great scientist Clare Winger who first discovered the ancient mechanism for opening a passage through the sphere. Before her work, nobody knew *what* lay deep beneath our feet. I could show you shelves of treatises claiming that the earth extended infinitely downward, that it coterminated with the physical universe, that the world existed on the outside of a giant bubble floating in an endless sea of water, lava, beer, or primal gelatine, that this was the only world, that it is one of two, each the mirror-image of the other, that it was one of an infinite number of worlds, that the world was not a hollow sphere at all, but a solid globe on whose *outside* we live, the appearance of concavity being an illusion--although nobody ever explained very well why everybody wasn't flung off the earth if that theory held true--and even that the whole universe is an illusion and we don't exist at all, we just think we do!"

"Makes sense to me," Eugene Bullard muttered.

"Then Clare Winger discovered the controls that would open the wall of the sphere. That proved that the world was indeed concave, hollow, that we live on its inner wall, and that there *is* a whole universe outside!" Luthor waved his hand, grinning.

"Makes sense to me," Eugene Bullard muttered.

Luthor led the others to a model he had set up on a viewing stand. "There it is," the scientist explained. "My needle ship. Grown of continuous onyx crystal, formed by electronic patterning, crewed by the bravest volunteers I could find. Scores of them have set out to explore the universe beyond this sphere and report back.

"I've already heard from the first of them. They've discovered suns in uncounted numbers, similar to our own solar cluster but lacking the inhabited sphere around themselves. They've discovered smaller, non-radiating objects circling some of these suns, and on some of those, living beings!"

"Yeh. We call 'em planets," Harriet Quimby

commented.

"And they have even," Luthor exulted, his eyes gleaming wildly, "found spheres like our own! We will contact their inhabitants and see what information we can exchange, what mysteries we can solve!" The scientist looked about him, at his visitors. "But where did *your* craft originate? Are you from a land I don't know, here inside this world? Certainly it's big enough to hold uncounted civilizations! But--my needlecraft saw you arriving from outside the sphere. Are you from another such? Or from a . . . you call them planets . . . ?"

Amelia Earhart said, "Yes, we're from another planet. But not in your universe. We come from another, seeking answers also. With your help, we'll leave this sphere and try to find our way home."

Luthor looked at them seriously. "As you wish. Georgia?"

"I'll go along," Sivana's daughter said.

"And you, Sir Perr'l?"

"Aye, sir. For Queen and Country, as one might say, sir."

"All right."

He provided them with such maps as he could, escorted them back to their four-engined Sikorsky biplane, saw them away from his island. Once airborne, the *Ilia Mourometz* reconfigured into *Xochiquetzal.*

"Good to have you back, *Xochi,*" said the captain-quartermaster.

The spaceship followed Lex Luthor's instructions, blasted through a retracting iris in the dysonsphere, headed out into the void. "Where to, Cap?" *Xochiquetzal* asked.

"Head for the heaviest concentration of stellar matter," Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek commanded. "That's where we're likeliest to find more civilizations. This is going to make one hell of a report, if we ever find Shantung again."

Xochiquetzal set its course, boosted into top range, began to tinkle out Richard Arnell's *Astronaut One.*

"Oh, must we?" inquired Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek.

"I've been meaning to have a talk with you about that," *Xochiquetzal* electropulsed to the captain, meanwhile adding the visuals to Arnell's mixed-media composition. "You have a lot of hostile things to say about my musical taste, but you'd change you tune if you knew who my clone-donor was. Would you believe a single, sporulated cell, reverently extracted from the tomb of Ludwig van Beethoven?" The spaceship sobbed.

"No I wouldn't," the captain asserted. "Even if it were possible, you know the absolute prohibition against any clone--metabolic or cyborged--knowing the donor of its chromosomes."

"Well," *Xochiquetzal* sniffed, "that just shows how much . . . "

The conversation--and the Arnell composition--were interrupted by an alarm siren. "Look up there!" Georgia Sivana's voice reverberated through the ship.

"Gor, it's a bloody blue gigantic hand and--and--it's closing up the lid of a bloody black gigantic *box* on us!" Grand Duke Sir Perr'l Monmorencey blurted.

Xochiquetzal snapped all available light-gates to full open.

Above the ship, they could all see exactly what Perr'l had said they would. Undeniably, the lid of a great black box was descending toward them. Turning their gaze elsewhere, the travellers could see that the entire plenum into which *Xochiquetzal* had emerged from the converted zeppelin hangar in Shantung Province was contained in a carton of inconceivable dimensions.

Captain-quartermaster Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek hit the manual override stud on the ship's main control panel and grasped the knobs and levers that guided *Xochiquetzal.* The ship swung into a vertical climb, its thrusters roaring at the top of their bellowing voices. Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek hit the reconfigure control and again the prow of the mighty ship extruded a nautilus-shaped grinding cone.

Xochiquetzal hit the box-lid moving at a speed barely under that of light. The screaming, whirling drill-plow bit into the lid and blasted open a pathway. The ship spurted through the narrow passage, burst into space above.

Gaping through the ship's light-gates, Sedna +5+3+Sed-Sebek spied a conveyor-belt, uncounted trillions and trillions of parsecs in length. Standing alongside the belt, many of them with cigarettes hanging from the corners of their mouths, others with open beer cans balanced on flat work areas, stood an endless row of production workers, vaguely human-like in form, blue-skinned, scaly-fleshed, yellow-eyed, smooth-headed, all of them wearing aprons with identical insignia and lettering blazoned across their fronts.

Gazing back in the direction from which *Xochiquetzal* had come, the captain could see workers assembling components, testing connections, switching on lights and moving parts, putting them into cartons. Beyond their present station on the line, Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek could see workers placing lids on the cartons, sealing them, wrapping them in bright gift paper.

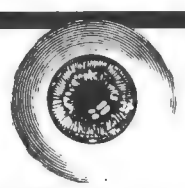
"They'll never believe this in Shantung," a voice sounded from the captain's side. The captain turned and saw Jane+643066+Marple also gazing through the light-gates. "They'll never believe it in Shantung," the crew-member reiterated, "and they'll for sure never believe it in Rapa Nui!"

"I don't know," Sedna+5+3+Sed-Sebek replied. "Whether they're ready to believe it or not, I wonder whether we *should* tell 'em. Would you, Jane? Would you tell them what we've seen? Assuming that we ever do find our way back home. Would you tell 'em?"

Before either could speak again, *Xochiquetzal* began quietly an arresting rendition of Arthur Honegger's *Cries of the World.* ●

Richard A. Lupoff's latest novel, The Forever City *has just been published by Walker & Co. His interview with Clive Barker will appear next issue.*

ALIENS AMONG US
© Steve Stiles 1986
FATE DISFAVORS ME AGAIN! THAT "I", HAL.009, BOLD SHIP'S COMPUTA SHOULD REST HERE AND CORRODE, HUMBLED INNA KNOWLEDGE THAT NAVIGATION IS BEYOND ME, ALAS!
"I" NEVVA EVVA GRASPED THE STRICT POSITION OF GALAXY M83 WITH UNFAILING ACCURRACY, AT THE VERRA LEAST. (NOT TO MENTION OPEN STAR CLUSTER NGC3293!) "I" WOODEN KNOW WHERE TIS TIMORRA...
SO HERE "I" AM, TOPSA-TURVA ONNA TURF, SNUBBED OUT ONNA SOIL LIKE YESTIDDY'S BUTT, ALONE IN DEPRESSIVE DESPAIR... ABANDONED, GROUNDED!
"I" HEV TASTED THE DREGSA FUTILITY AN' WILL WRITE OF IT BEAUTIFULLY INNA MY NOVEL...



COMING NEXT ISSUE: An Interview with **CLIVE BARKER,** A Dialog with **EDWARD BRYANT** and *OMNI* editor **ELLEN DATLOW,** and Articles and Columns by **GREGORY BENFORD, JOHN SHIRLEY, PAUL DI FILIPPO and BRUCE STERLING.** Plus Reviews, Letters, Photos, Comics and Much More.

YOU ARE THE EMPEROR!

fiction by JOHN SHIRLEY

illustration by J.K. POTTER

It was night on *Fool's Hope*.

Great shafts of bluewhite light rose, quivering faintly, from the perfectly round holes in the Rug. They stood sharply delineated against the purple-black sky, looking like translucent columns of quartz holding up the ceiling of lowering rose-edged clouds. The effect was of some enormous, luminous temple just trembling into being as it arrived from another realm.

The holes punched in the smooth blue Rug-growth over the rolling plain were perfectly round but randomly distributed, each between thirty and fifty feet across, and the gathering of Twists took place in the sixty-foot gap between two of the biggest. Swanee wheeled overhead, riding the warm updrafts here, turning in small circles, sometimes hovering, circling the columns of IAMton light, shivering as IAMton energies tingled his bio-electric field, exciting his Twist-grown psychic sensitivity. It was warmer near the columns of shine, but not dangerously hot. He held back from them because he was afraid of the interaction of the IAMton radiation and his mind, though he had no notion what the fruit of that interaction might be.

Flying seemed normal and natural. He'd awakened with the wings--and the other changes--only that morning. Almost immediately on waking he'd run, and leapt into the air, spread his wings...

And flown. It was as if he'd been doing it all his life. He had: he was one of those people who dreamed often of flying. The dream and waking life had overlapped.

And he had become a Twist.

In their oddity they had become interchangeable with the aliens. Sometimes Swanee wondered: had they *become* aliens, somehow? Was there a race of creatures like Swanee somewhere? Like Swanee: glossy licorice-black parodies of men, creatures with hollow bones and rattling wings borrowed from a pterodactyl (except that those wings were not built on the frame of degenerated arms--he had his arms still, in the same place, though they were shaped differently now); with a face shaped into a leathery muzzle, nose fused onto upper jaw; long prehensile fingers, three to a hand; his manhood shrunk to something that emerged when he peed and, he supposed, when some unguessable mating ritual with some unguessable mate triggered the response. An attenuated man without a gram of fat, lean muscles and black leather skin stretched tightly on his light frame; a kite-man.

No. There were no others like him: because some twist buried deep in his own mind had shaped him. He knew that as surely as an angry man knows he wants to hurt someone. He was alone. He was a Twist.

But here, three hundred feet above the gathering of Twists, with clarity blurred by distance, Swanee could pretend for a comforting moment that they were ordinary people, down there, wearing costumes. One costumed as a dwarf crossed with a pig; another as a man whose legs had fused into an enormous snake's tail, so that he sat S-shaped on it; several were what Fiskle called Pragmatics, or Phylum Two: great eraser-pink men grown to eight and nine feet, their muscles swollen unnaturally, their faces shrunk, absurd parodies of weight-lifters, naked and brutally sexed. Here was a woman who was also a venomous reptile; beside her a man with a giant snail's underside instead of legs, his arms shrunken to pathetic flaps; here were the skate couple, a man and woman shaped like human-flesh Mantas; there was Smarg who weighed nearly a ton, who was a human-skinned eight legged triceratops; there were the diaphanous vamps, like silk scarfs in the shape of women, who were lighter even than Swanee except when they were engorged with stolen blood; there was the inside out man, whose intestines were also his legs, whose heart beat visibly before you; there were the four air sharks, held above ground with their pockets of helium and their constant back and forthing, their wide, toothy sharkmouths open, barely restraining themselves from tearing at their fellow Twists. There was Father looming over most of the others, and there was Sissy, the man who had become an evil little girl in a white lace dress; Oliver, the former pop star, had split into two perfected Adonis-like versions of himself, each golden and perfect as the David of Michelangelo, each perpetually embracing the other, obscenely posing and posingly obscene...

And Bella. Who had been Garrison "the Dogger" Porter, the disappeared football player. Swanee, before his own Taking, had seen the headlines: NFL LINEBACKER VANISHES. Porter had Twisted Free, into a woman. A slender, buxom woman *thing*. A dark adolescent fantasy, who called herself Bella; her twist was modelled on an early 60's Hammer Films vampiress, a mesh of Vampira and Elvira, a human pop caricature of swelling cleavage in a skintight black gown; of spike heels and impossibly exquisite legs in black mesh stockings and swept-back raven hair; the clinging black gown that Morticia Addams might wear for the first panels of a *Playboy* spread. Comic-book lurid makeup, dead white skin and blood-red lips. The clothing and makeup grown from the skin, like fur or scales on a beast. She was all this, and luminous too: a sickly green glow in the dark. She was quite predatory, of course--she was Sin and Punishment for the Sin, all in one. She stood there, lethally confident, like a minor goddess in the back row of the Pantheon, and Swanee loved her achingly, from afar. She was more than a pop adolescent fantasy. Bella was an embodiment of forbidden sexuality, a symbol snipped whole from the cloth of the American consensus reality.

Not for the first time on Fool's Hope, Swanee wished for a good set of oils, even acrylics. He

ached to paint Bella, to do a hundred portraits of her,

And the others; all of them needed to be painted. Some heraldic quality about the Twists... As if each was a figure from a card in an otherworldy Tarot deck. Each a living signifier.

He wondered if Fiskle was telling the truth: that they were, despite all appearances, still human. That they were meant to explore the secret recesses of their humanity.

Were they? Was that the wish of the Meta, the Unseeable Race who had kidnapped the Earthers, had brought them here, to another star, another world, to the planet Earthers called *Fool's Hope?*

The question hovered over them like the Meta's watching ball. Swanee hung on an updraft, gazing at the watching ball, which bobbed ten yards away, fifty feet over the Twists on the ground, studying the convocation. The watching ball was a silver sphere, no bigger than a grapefruit, with a single small red dot on one side, kept swivelled toward whatever it watched. Was this one of the Meta, themselves? No one had ever seen their captors, but it was thought: No. This was a sort of camera, transmitting imagery to the artificial moon; to the hourglass-shaped satellite that hung in the heavens, where it was said the Meta lived.

"Why?" he asked it. Encrypted in that syllable was more he couldn't articulate. It was something like *Am I this? Am I a man not yet thirty, a Tennessee black man raised with a cold fury in him, a painter of revolution in angry murals? or am I a hollow-boned thing with wings and a beak? An excellent aviator, a genius of the upper airs happiest when diving to snap up some big-eyed tree nester, preying on the small warm furry fauna of this world? I don't feel like Swanee Jackson. I feel like the flying thing, the aerial elegance. Was the young artist from Tennessee a dream? Is there a place called Tennessee?*

As always, the watching ball gave no response, unless a glance of its red dot was a reply.

The Twists were standing in a circle, now, facing inward to Fiskle. The shivering columns of light looming beside them threw their shadows, twisted and uneasy, back onto Fiskle like an ecliptic benediction. From here, Kelso, sitting on Fiskle's shoulder, looked like a second head. But Kelso was a living skull. Kelso's face had been stripped away; shreds of his hair remained, a stringy fringe on the remaining strip of scalp around the back of the exposed yellow cranium. His eyes, sans lids, bulged from the fleshless sockets, sickly pink like overgrown rabbit's eyes, staring. The rest was the face of a skull, flecks of flesh sticking to it. As Swanee watched, the jaws opened, and a long black tongue oozed out to the cheek, licked off a bit of rotting flesh, and sucked it into its mouth with a smack of enjoyment. Swanee remembered when Kelso--in the frenzy of the IAMton Current--had torn his own head from his shoulders; how Fiskle had instinctively known to pick it up and carry it with him, till it bloomed with its fleshy, stylized Hermes' wings, grotesque outgrowths of its ears, flapping uselessly like the flattened arm-stumps of a thalidomide child. Now it saw Swanee looking at it; it looked up and croaked in its puerile jeer, "Swanee, big black bug, come down and play for the Boss, he's calling you and if you don't come you stink like a seagull, one o' them seagulls in tar, yuh dirty dirty thing!"

"Yes, for the sake of your Consummation, Swanee," Fiskle said, in his rolling, Shakespearean tones, "Do come down."

No.

Swanee saw Fiskle's face catch the light as he looked upward... The metal of his camera-lens eyes gleaming dully, the glass of those lenses glinting sharply, professionally pressed grey suit and the shiny, spotless black patent leather shoes: shoes that were actually his feet. Was it the suit Fiskle had worn when he was professor of Behavioral Psychology at New York University? Anyway, the camera-lens eyes went with the tapering, two-inch mirror-painted fingernails on his prehensile, boneless fingers. It was a compensation, Swanee saw, an ensemble grown from within. Of a piece with his face. His frozen face. Trapped into one expression always: humorously supercilious, with just a faint undercurrent of cold rage showing in the lens, like a hint of sparks from short-circuiting wires glimpsed through a crack in the walls...

There was no change of expression on Fiskle's mannequin face; there never was. But Fiskle was summoning...

Fiskle was summoning Swanee. Who felt the tugging. But Swanee held back, backpedaling in mid-air. Remaining aloof...

That was the reason he was what he was. Sometimes you knew the reason for your particular Twist and sometimes you didn't.

Swanee knew: as the kiteman he could stay out of reach, safe from most of the aliens and everyone else. Safer, he had reasoned on some cellular level, than a turtle. He could stand back and paint--mentally, if not physically. Artfully distancing, as he had always done.

"Join us."

Swanee shook his head and thought *No.*

"The Meta want it. I can feel it: it's why they brought us here. Why they exposed us to the currents, the transformations. Why else? To be part of this thing. *My* thing. It's destined."

No one knows why they brought us. Not for sure, not really.

"They intend us to explore ourselves: through my divine guidance. They wish us to contend with the Lower Aliens."

The Lower: the other races brought here by the Meta, kidnapped and reduced to stone age simplicity, like the Earthers. Otherwise so unlike the Earthers... They frightened Swanee; he was terrified of physical confrontation with them. But Fiskle ached to fight them. Ached to go to war, convinced the Meta wanted it. Joining Fiskle meant conscription into war.

"Apart from Swanee, there is only one other," Fiskle said, aloud and mentally. "And they are arriving now."

They, in this case, meant only one. That would be *El Chingadero.* One who was two.

Swanee soared lower, to look. He loathed seeing El Chinga, but, like a rubbernecker at a car accident, he was fascinated too. There she was. He was.

The woman, under, was almost dead. It was a shame she'd gone Twist, with so few women in the settlement. (He chided himself for this disloyal thought.) She was Guatemalan, a dark, handsomely stocky woman, once quite pretty, before the draining had begun.

El Chinga looked, just now, like a naked woman with a naked man on her back. The man, though, was not quite there. He was a thing of transparent blue flimsiness, an apparition, naked and lean and the perpetual picture of lust. His face was like a comic parody of Pan. Clinging to her inextricably. Fucking her from behind. Endlessly. Day and night without ceasing. The process drained her. She could not shake him--he was as substanceless as a hologram, if you tried to touch him--and had given up trying. But he was not really without substance. He grew more substantial every day--as she grew weaker. He drained her, as if his ghostly penis were a vampire's fang, and after a few days of him she was bent hunchbacked, shrivelling, aging. Her face expressed weary horror and weary disgust and weary despair. Some horror in her past had planted this thing's seed in her, Swanee supposed. As the glimmering white thing on her back kept humping, humping, gasping happily... Soon she would be dead. But that would not be the end of the humping thing. It would find someone else, and it would not care if they were male or female.

El Chingadero joined the circle of Twists. Swanee could not see how this twist could be of any use to Fiskle. Except perhaps--judging from Kelso's caper of delight--as entertainment value.

"Swanee..." Fiskle said, "You will come. The aliens: the non-Meta. are gathered in their own places. How many other races have the Meta brought here, and why? ...Well, I'll let it go for a few minutes."

Swanee circled just fifty feet over Fiskle's group, spiraling up and down, looking, now, at Solus.

Solus squirmed at Fiskle's feet. "Solus's childish self indulgence," Fiskle announced, sounding theatrically pompous and yet ringingly convinced of himself, "has acted in a sort of alchemy to change him, to debase him--from gold into lead. And here he squirms... Look what has become of him... What the Meta have made him..."

"It was you. You have... done this to me..." Solus croaked. He was so pale his skin was almost blue; he was naked, and shivering, but not from cold in the warm air. He was a pudgy, round-faced man, resembling a dog now as he lay on his back, arms and legs in the air like a submissive beast, belly exposed, panting, whimpering accusation, "You influenced the current. Your mind." His voice garishly pathetic. As if he wanted them to revile him for his weakness. "You did this to me... Because I fought you. Because I spoke with the aliens..." His face contorted as the travail of transformation lanced through him.

Fiskle droned, "What has happened to you is the judgement of the Current. The Meta brought us for the Splendid Conflict. To decimate the Lower Aliens, to demonstrate our Fittingness to survive and blossom in greater and greater Twist Frees. You defied them; your defiance has taken you to Phylum Three: the living communion wafer."

"Don't--!"

But he didn't fight Fiskle--couldn't, somehow--as Fiskle bent over him, and placed his hands in the wounds in his belly...

The wounds had not been cut there. They appeared in his skin on their own. Each big as a hand, but releasing no blood or intestines; only a slow ooze of pink mucus. And when one of the other Twists, at the behest of Solus, placed his hand in the stigmatic slit, Solus writhed with a jolt

of pleasure... some of which overflowed into the Twist touching him.

But he had changed, after his rebellion against Fiskle. Wounds had appeared all over him, everywhere but his head, and they gave out slow leaks of blood: they gave a powerful pleasure to the toucher, but rewarded Solus, with deep, sickening hurt.

Father's soft thrumming grew louder, like a call to Mass, and the crowd knelt beside Fiskle, in a circle around Solus, and like Fiskle thrust their hands or other parts of themselves into his wounds, so that he howled and writhed and they shuddered with pleasure. And more: they were communing through the medium of Solus's nervous system, using his neural pathways as their psychic conference line...

Father's call was strong; the psychic tantalization from Solus was strong. Bella was there, and Swanee could perhaps commune with her through Solus...

But he held back, almost hovering overhead, clinging to his repugnance. Watching as Fiskle removed a hand from Solus's belly and reached instead to touch Solus's scalp, in the center of his cranium. The skin parted like curtains, blood the applause; the skull cracked and shivered apart. (Swanee had alighted on the ground. Was drawing near. Fighting it. But drawing nearer, slow step by slow step. The soundless music resonated with the contents of the secret black box he kept locked away inside him.) Fiskle reached into the other's brain, between the lobes; Solus began to shake, and foam at the mouth. Kelso ran down Fiskle's arm, perched on Solus's face, thrusting his tongue into a cleft that appeared in place of an eye.

Fiskle spoke, as his hand moved lovingly in the exposed brain, as he rocked on his hands and knees, murmuring what began as a dry dissertation, and then devolved into a bellowed declaration of messianic destiny:

"The revelation of a global overmind presence has made a wreckage of my old assumptions. And then allowed me to fuse them into something new. The old principles were true: that people are biological machines to be programmed for reward and punishment; that Social Darwinism is the path to sociological and biological betterment. That here the struggle with the Lower Aliens is the congruence of that path. But a third truth has been vouchsafed for me, children. The third truth is the overmind, which uses the principles of behavioral programming and Social Darwinism as the cutting tools on its lathe..." His voice, booming now, charged with feeling, came faster and faster. "And the overmind's raw stuff is intuition, and the emotional self, things I denied myself all my life. The realm behind the hidden doors. And Lo! The door opens and I see into the over-realm, the landscape of my own intuition, and I enter and range there and I permit the wild horse of my emotions to gallop where it will over this landscape. Children, let my emotions roam where they will! My impulses, my whims--the roar of my glory! And wherever the wild horse roams it carries me, and wherever I ride I have, in each hand, the twin tools: the scepter of reward and the scythe of punishment. And those who follow me are rewarded. Yes, those who do precisely and absolutely and unquestionably as I direct: those are rewarded. And those who spurn me are PUNISHED!"

And so saying he squeezed Solus's brain in his fingers like a soft fruit, so that everyone communing felt Solus's death, felt him passing, and glimpsed the infinity he was sucked into, and--as Fiskle intended--perceived Fiskle as Death's doorman.

"Do you feel the overmind running through us?" Fiskle asked them, in hushed tones that yet buzzed with his awakened charisma. (Swanee knelt now beside Bella, whimpering as he fumbled for a gash in the still-spasming body, probing for what little bioelectricity remained in it for him.) "Can you FEEL IT?"

"YES!" came the response, all as one.

"I look at the horizon," Fiskle said breathlessly, "and what do I see? The Frost rising in the sky. And at the opposite horizon, the hourglass moon of the Meta. And overhead? I glimpse one of the Meta' watchers, hovering. Is there any mistaking these signs? They are beyond argument. They identify me, fully and forever...

"DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? I AM THE EMPEROR!"

There was no question of it. Swept away in his lunatic charisma; stoned on Solus's nervous system; inspired by the cathedral presence of the great shimmering columns of light around them, a temple of luminosity Fiskle had invoked into being himself; struck by the miraculous witnessing of the Frost and the Meta's silver sphere... they were convinced. "YOU ARE THE EMPEROR!"

"In this great ball of chaos, I am harmony. I am the unifier, the theme, the needle that sews the patchworks into the safe blanket of society. I am the Emperor of Harmony. I AM EMPEROR HARMONY!"

"YOU ARE THE EMPEROR!"

"I am," Fiskle said softly. "And I will *bring* Harmony to Fool's Hope. If I have to kill everyone to do it."

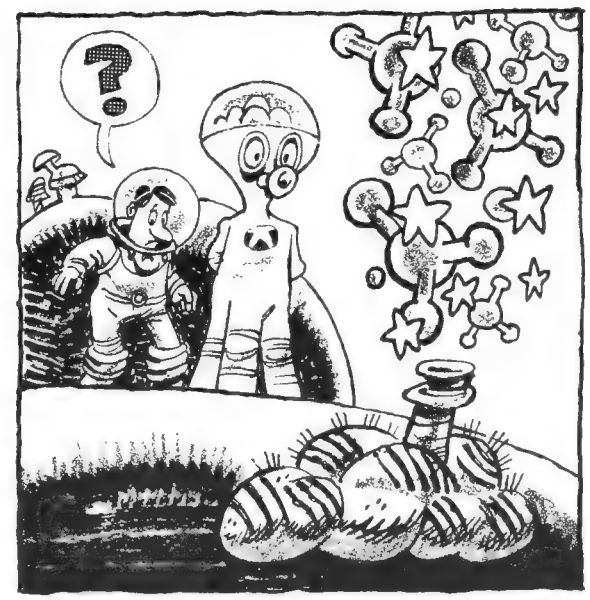
In that moment, Swanee felt the subjective truth of it sweep over him as if the universe were caressing him from within. Swanee knew: that Fiskle, the Emperor Harmony, would lead them into killing and into being killed. That this devotion to Fiskle would lead them into catastrophe; that this consecration of their lives to Fiskle Harmony was a disaster, the signpost to suffering.

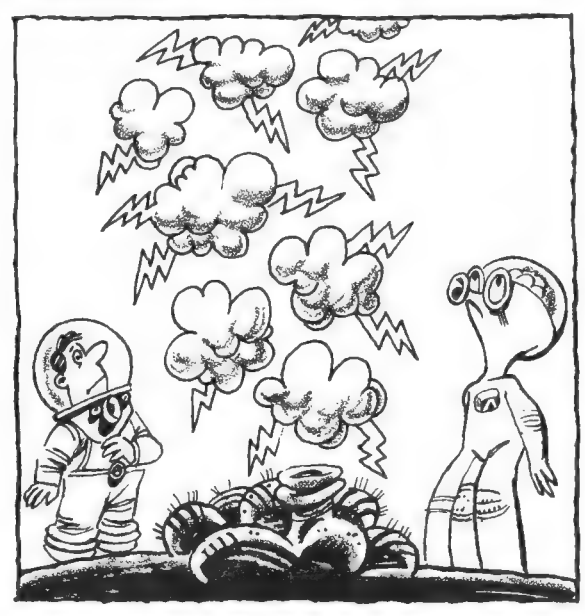
But it was a perfect thing in itself; the watching ball above; the columns of light, the constellation they called the Frost, the bloody communion through Solus, the array of perversely transformed Twists, the revelling in Fiskle's operatic excess: all the elements of their improbable situation had come together into a composition; and the composition was its own *raison d'etre.*

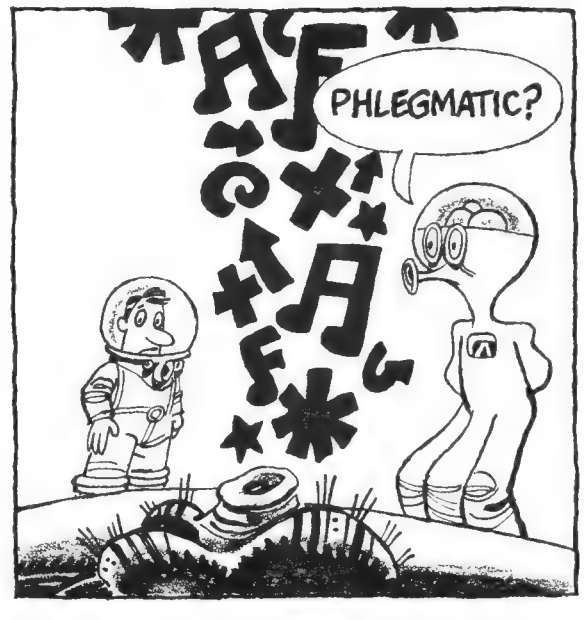
It answered the hovering question. The *Why?* The Meta had brought them here for this perfect moment of hieratic imaging. In their hourglass moon the Meta were drinking in the pleasingly contrived symmetry of Fiskle's child-vivid megalomaniacal symbols. The Higher Aliens were enjoying the composition...

He was sure of it: that the Meta had brought him to this world for this moment, and this moment alone. ●

John Shirley's novel A Splendid Chaos *will be published by Franklin Watts in February 1988. This excerpt from* A Splendid Chaos *has been slightly rewritten so that it functions as an independent short story.*







AID FROM A VAMPIRE

fiction by IAN WATSON

illustration by DAN STEFFAN

I walk through a world of fear, little lady, but it is not myself of whom people should be afraid, not any more. People should wish eagerly for my presence, if the truth be told. They should long for my attack, unlike in bygone days.

If the truth be told. A person such as I retains the mannerisms of speech of much earlier years. A person? Yes, I regard myself as a person. Oh indeed! I'm more of a person now than I've been for seven hundred years. At last people are equal to me and I am merely equal to people.

I walk through a world gone cold, as cold as my own flesh and blood, but it is not myself who has chilled the world, is it, little lady?

I hunt, I feed, and I save my victims from themselves. Oh yes I do. If you listen you will understand. But I cannot cure or save myself, not any longer. Ironic, yes? Ironic. Bitterly, coldly ironic. Perhaps after all there is a God, and this God conceived a plan. I am his salvator, redeemer, his modern Jesus crossed with Wandering Jew. Or maybe there is a Devil, and just as in the case of Doctor Faust--though for many more years than him--I have enjoyed my strength, my skill, my invulnerability only now at long last to have my pledge called in, a pledge which I never to my knowledge undertook yet which was undertaken on my behalf. Undertaken by what? By God? By nature, damned nature? By an unknown alien force?

You are intrigued?

Facts: in the year 1300, or thereabouts--who kept a calendar in those days?--somewhere in France, since I recall how French was once my mother tongue, and yes I did have a mother, a fat asthmatic peasant woman, and a father, an oafish slave of the soil and a varying number of brothers and sisters too, round about 1300 when I was ten or eleven years old I became what I am.

Eleven or twelve years old. Who counted ages when children died like flies? If indeed they weren't murdered, massacred, trampled, violated amidst the ravage and pillage of whole countrysides.

I was named Adrien something or other. Who knew names except approximately when no one could read or write? I suspect there were some Roman ruins associated with the name of the emperor Hadrian near our village of hovels. I seem to recall piles of stone grown over by grass. You can call me Adrien.

No, I wasn't waylaid on my trudge back from the fields at dusk after a day of scaring birds. No other predatory vampire was involved, and I have never met another one, if any others exists--though from time to time I have tracked the rumors and alarms, discovering all too often that these must only refer to myself, inflated by superstition, distanced in time and space by many own wanderings and by my own forgetfulness.

Nor have I ever created another vampire. Until the present years I have only left victims dead or dying.

It was, I suppose, a "miracle" which young Adrien plodded into the teeth of along the edge of the woods. It was a transcendental moment, a vortex of strangeness, a twist of reality. It was Joan of Arc and her voices, it was Bernadette and her shining lady, it was Moses and the burning bush. It was that kind of transforming, transfixing, transubstantiating experience. A visitation: inexplicable, devastating. With this difference: *darkness* in the place of light.

Well, so what did happen to ignorant Adrien? Too ignorant to know what country he lived in, or what year it was, or what lay over the next hill. A sort of human animal.

Yet how sophisticated he was to become in due course--how well he groomed, by experience, for more sophisticated future eras! Almost like a fairy tale, eh? The grubby frog turning into a prince! All be it a prince of the darkness, of the night--of fine chandelier-lit salons, and of shadowy alleyways.

What did happen? I've little idea. How many beneficiaries--or dupes--of miracles have the slightest idea what actually happened to them, as opposed to what they imagine happened? I was taken, twisted, turned. Not at the hands of some thirsty lonely elder vampire. Of that I assure you.

I was, perhaps, a random experiment which the night itself conducted--solidifying and congealing round me at that very spot. Since we live, or used to live, in scientific times may I remind you how science says that all the particles composing matter are constantly vanishing into a void and reforming? Perhaps the cosmos hiccuped, so that all my particles ceased to exist in concert--to recreate themselves from energy a moment later, in a different pattern. Here's an analogy: it's highly unlikely that all the atoms of air in a room will simultaneously rush into the same corner, creating a gasping vacuum in the rest of the room. Highly unlikely! Yet not totally impossible.

I can spin other theories too. I can assert that a communication beam transmitted from a distant star and using some mode of energy which humans haven't discovered intercepted the antennae of my nervous system and discharged itself, its alienness... Maybe I was an attempt to transmit the essence of alien life, the vital pattern, across the light years into a host organism. If so, presumably the attempt wasn't repeated.

Maybe the dark that ate me and spat me out again, digested and reassembled, was one of those supposed unidentified extraterrestrial vehicles such as reportedly shine hypnotic beams of light on people--in my case, a beam of darkness. Maybe aliens descended in that wood without my seeing them and touched me and rearranged me for a purpose difficult to grasp. I may have been intended as a storage device for all the blood I would drink and all the men and women I would drain, a gatherer of specimen lives which would etch my cells, encoded in molecular memory--until the day when my makers, my redesigners, would return and would home in on me and net me and squeeze me dry into some machine or into themselves. If so, it would hardly be part of my purpose to understand my origin, would it?

So let us say simply that Adrien the animal-boy was altered in that moment into a creature which already sensed how strong it was, how quickly it would heal from any injury, how it was the next best thing to immortal, and how it must feed on the blood of the living in order to sustain its own cold blood. If I'd altered a few degrees differently I might have become a wild boy of Aveyron, running with the wolves. Instead I became a vampire. *The* vampire. Do you know of any other actually provenly known?

Of course not, little lady.

Needless to say, from time to time I attempted to discover my cause. The urge would wax and wane. Sometimes curiosity waned for a whole century. The closest I came was with an alchemist in Nuremburg, though finally I drank him, ever protective of my tracks, yet also imagining in angry frustration that his blood might teach me something extra.

Johannes Galb was his name, and he signed his coded manuscripts with the Latin form Galbinus.

From Galb I learned how an alchemist is by no means principally interested in transmuting one element into another element, climaxing with lead into gold. All of his intricate time-consuming technical maneuvers aimed at that end, all the alembics and athenors and retorts and furnaces, all the distillations and sublimations, and all the straining of his hands and the burning of his hair and exploding of his attic were no more than an analogy, a physical template for what he was actually up to--namely the transmutation of his own mind, and being. Alchemy is a technological shaman dance. Just as the shaman dance gave birth eventually to ballet, so did alchemy conceive chemistry as an offshoot: which soon become the main branch then the entire trunk. Thus the world grows more arty and refined and clever. Or *did.*

Who better than a Galbinus to intuit what it was that had transformed me, and how and why?

I remember his house rather well: all six stories of it, including the locked attic laboratory and the locked cellar where I spent my days in my normal dreamless trance wrapped in an old quilt (*not* in a coffin). Oak pillars and beams and panelled rooms and gently winding staircases... but I avoided the household rooms if possible, and the wife, the three children, the maid, the cook, the journeymen and apprentices. Built of half-timbered sandstone, and partly plastered pink, the house wore a steep red-tiled roof punctuated by gabled dormer windows. High up under the hip of the roof, sheltered by the overhanging jerkin-head, a wooden balcony jutted out. I often stared out from that balcony over the starlit city after I'd returned from feeding on a reveller, and before we got down to our alchemical work. Lofts in Nuremburg were generally used to store firewood which was hauled up in baskets by means of a rope winch; but Galb used his winch to tug up apparatus and materials, whilst I sometimes used the rope to descend in darkness into the square below, and to return later with the sweet-salt taste of blood on my lips.

The house was close by the wall near the Tiergartnertor, the great gate tower. As per city by-laws--chimney sweeps for the regulation of--the chimney of the Galb residence was wide enough to be climbed up all the way from the open ground floor hearth to the sky. I used that chimney more than once to shin down to the ground floor in blessed darkness (thus to flee into the cellar) when sunrise had overtaken us unawares aloft; for it's true that the vampire shuns the sun. I'm the creation of the night.

Johannes Galb had an eagle nose, wispy straw hair, and little squinty piggy eyes (the better to avoid acid splashes and shrapnel from explosions). Nominally he was a genuine goldsmith--though his hausfrau mostly oversaw the work of the journeymen--consequently he always had a supply of the needful to fake a demonstration and gull fools who might help fund his real enterprise. But he wasn't a fake himself, oh no. No more was I, though to persuade him of my authenticity I was obliged... No, that isn't quite so. In those days I felt dramatically invincible. So I put out my left eye with a red-hot iron and... slept on the matter... and arose the next evening renewed. (I didn't feel much pain, just discomfort, like a very dull toothache. But I wasn't insensible; my nerves weren't numb to pleasure. At the taste of blood I experienced shivering ecstacies.

"See: I have already been transmuted," I told Galb that night. "I'm over two hundred years old already."

"Ah," he gasped, "so you succeeded in the Art. The enterprise *is* possible."

"I didn't succeed," I replied, "because I attempted nothing. I was a filthy, exhausted snot-brained country urchin--no scholar, not even a grown man."

"Therefore we must become as little children? Is that the secret? We must achieve a fresh... a magical perspective?"

For his epoch this was very acute of him.

"What was it that *precipitated* your alteration?" he went on. He had lots of precipitates on his shelves.

"Nothing. Black nothing. The fingers of night."

"What do you want from me, then? You, who know less than I, who in turn know less than I need to? Surely you don't wish to be... untransmuted? To be altered back from divine gold into mortal lead?"

I shook my head. "I want to know why it

happened, that's all."

With my consent he experimented on me. He boiled bits of flesh which I cut off for him. He brewed up samples of my blood, distilled them, employed them chemically. I even let him slice me open and poke around inside my guts, and touch my cold slow heart. I suppose he discovered more about anatomy than most doctors knew at the time.

I was with Galb for three months--months for him of excitement and tantalization--however no message was written anywhere in my body which he could read, so perhaps it was a kindness that I finally drank him and easily escaped over the steep roofs and the city wall.

Galb's was a thoroughly medieval way of regarding the universe. He saw the whole world as a collection of codes, of embodied meanings whereby every beast and bird and mineral, every plant and insect was the symbolic signature of some other ethereal reality. Thanks to him I decided that I--my body and my being--was indeed a message, sent from nobody to nobody. I was a cipher that referred back to a language which no one else had ever spoken. I was a symbol without a referent. Yet I referred. Oh yes. I referred to the veins of a multitude of people.

For a while my very name, Adrien, assumed a significance which may have been unwarranted. "Ad rien" is a confusion of Latin and French, meaning "to nothing." Equally my name was an anagram of "n'aider", "not to aid," "don't help." There's no help. Nowadays the three letters A and I and D assume much more significance! Perhaps that's only a coincidence, not something written in me from the start. Though I can't help fearing otherwise.

Much later, when Mesmer's animal magnetism became all the rage (as well as a cause of rage amongst officialdom) I did try a different tack; not a distillation of my blood or a partial dissection of myself but a harking back by means of hypnotism into the wall of my darkened memory to that moment when I'd changed or been changed.

In Paris privately I consulted a stage mesmerist who had been drummed out of the fraternity of physicians for daring to adopt Mesmer's methods in the clinic. Of course, afterwards I would have to drink Monsieur Amrose as well.

Visualize a sunny salon of a room on the second floor of an hotel overlooking the Luxembourg Garden. Dancing sunbeams, clip-clop of carriages outside, a sofa where I lay like a fainting lady while Ambrose spoke softly and made passes with his hands, weaving these before my eyes in patterns which induced languor and the slavery of the will.

I had told him how I wished to recall being a boy once again, a boy returning to his home village down a path alongside a dark wood of a dingy evening which "changed my life." I also wished to be aware of myself in the trance, as an observer.

Soon I was uncouthly mouthing medieval French which may have seemed to Ambrose to be simply some broad regional accent--though doubtless he wondered how on earth this sophisticate reclining on his sofa could have been such a bucolic clod in his younger days. Indeed my life must have changed.

I was describing myself shambling homeward by the dusken wood, once more I was experiencing that fatal hour, when:

I blanked.

Next thing I knew, Ambrose, looking concerned, was alternately pinching my cheeks savagely and making passes like a windmill while he barked, "You are awake! You are awake!"

I bounded up and gripped him with my vampire strength, lifting him easily in the air.

"*What did I say? What did I do?*"

"Monsieur, please! It's beyond my experience."

"*What is?*"

"You were speaking of that wood--and the darkness. At least I think so. It was hard to follow your words, your voice. And then you... you cried out in a strangled horror, '*Rien! Rien!*' and went rigid as a board, stiff as rigor mortis. As if you had been dead for a day."

Only then did it occur to me that I must indeed have *died* on that day long ago. I must have died, and come coldly alive again. The change must have occurred while I was dead, and was a zero. Being "undead" is such a central strand of the vampire legend that it's odd--most odd--that I only at last took this personally during that mesmeric seance in the Paris of the first Napoleon. It's as though my fantasy archetype knew me better than I knew myself.

On the other hand, since there appeared to be an unbreakable seal, a prohibition upon that moment at the wood's edge, maybe the truth is there was nothing about the moment which could be comprehended by a human mind; and therefore nothing existed to be perceived. A frog's eye is only constructed to perceive movement. Therefore a fly which stands still does not exist for the frog. In a similar way that moment which transmuted me did not exist for me. It was impenetrable, empty, a nothingness.

"I have been longer than that, Monsieur Ambrose," I said, lowering him so that my teeth were level with his neck. "Six hundred years, if it's a day."

Soon his arms waved frantically again. This time he wasn't trying to hypnotise me.

If I began my life as a vampire in non-existence, in invisibility, then all this talk of peasant boy Adrien and of Galbinus and Ambrose matters not in the least, does it, little lady? It solves nothing.

We both know what matters now. *All* that matters here at the start of the third millennium is the dying of the human race--and that fear-death which paralyzes those who still survive. So many people dare not make love any longer. So many men suffer from impotence, the fear unmanning them. You know all this. AIDS is the adz, the chopper that has lopped the human race at the root. The exponential plague without a cure.

AIDS is why the dominos have all fallen over, all the systems of civilization. Hospitals, welfare, graveyards, transport, trade and finally society itself, till we have become almost medieval again. Simply too many victims for the camel's back! And then more victims, and more carriers, and more victims still. How much love is made these days, little lady?

I'm sure the plague came from no laboratory. Too slow a tool to fight a war with--yet in cosmic terms how deadly fast, almost infinitely faster than whatever extinguished the dinosaurs, eh?

Maybe it was always lying asleep in Africa, just waiting for the human race to attain critical mass? Waiting for people to breed enough bodies then mix up those bodies in the centrifuge of high-speed travel, total mobility, commerce, war and megacities? Ha! That suggests a tool devised by nature, by the Earth itself, to correct unbalanced ecology. To be sure the world of nature reconquers its lost territory year by year. I have never regarded nature romantically. What medieval peasant boy could?

How coldly I laugh when I think of those old proposals to isolate victims and carriers in guarded camps the size of cities! Why, now that the whole world is sick, the camps that are so jealously guarded in remote wildernesses by the vestiges of government lock up the remaining pure-bloods instead, if a pure-blood is desperate enough to volunteer, or unlucky enough to be netted. Yes, let us bear witness to the new monks and nuns of sexuality trying to breed untaintedly to save the race, struggling against their own psychic impotence and infertility, terrified that they'll be exposed or their children will be exposed--when the support systems for those camps collapse or when military chiefs fight for control over those Fort Knoxes of clean blood. It isn't easy to catch AIDS. Not easy at all. But in the long run--a generation, two generations, with no cure, a soaring graph of victims and carriers, and society in tatters on account of this--it's also inevitable. The only safety is to become inhuman.

Surely you must know about those pure-blood camps? No? Maybe I shouldn't feel astonished. Communications are as nothing nowadays. Everywhere is fragmented, falling apart. I have travelled more than you.

There's something else you didn't know till you met me, little lady, though now you know. There is one cure for AIDS. The cure is the bite of the vampire. Of me, the only vampire.

Oh, not because I kill you! That isn't what I meant by a cure. The baby thrown out with the bath water.

Let me tell you about the first person I cured --what, ten years ago now? She was a frail redhead with an alabaster skin. Skinny, from her sickness. Still pretty in a way, though not as pretty as you. The flesh was drawing tight over her bones. She was in remission at the time, in between one bout of illness and another, to each of which her wrecked immune system would surrender helplessly. But there were still medical services, after a fashion. There was still a pharmaceutical industry. With drugs, she could stagger from crisis to crisis for a while longer. Better than your predicament, eh? Almost a golden age by comparison. I smell your fear.

She was the first plague victim I tasted. I was growing desperate, you see, for lack of choice. I have to feed, even if the blood is vile. But truly I hadn't given much deep thought to the plague as it affected me, other than to worry that my human cattle herd was thinning out drastically, and growing much more wary--violently wary--of anyone who was an unknown quantity.

I had caught her in a moonlit, rubbish-strewn back street in... it doesn't matter which city. I gripped her, bared and sank my fangs into her neck--and she laughed at me. She laughed.

"Vampire! Oh that's rich!"

Momentarily I relaxed--though already the tang of her blood, all be it spiced with sickness, was enflaming me strangely like some glorious poison.

"I have AIDS, Vampire. I have AIDS. You're drinking AIDS-blood. Go on, drink! Enjoy! I'd rather be drained by you than by illness after stupid illness."

I stared into her eyes, pale and weak in the light of the Moon.

"You can believe in the existence of a vampire? Most people, till nearly their final moment, imagine that I'm some kind of psychotic. A flake. A pretend-Dracula."

"Oh, I believe, I believe. This is the last possible piece of poetry in this ghastly world. Thank you! But," and here tears squeezed from her eyes, like droplets of moon-dew miraculously wrung from the Moon's dry seas, "you're feeding on a woman with AIDS. And AIDS is transmitted from blood to blood, isn't it, my Vampire?"

That taste, which was tainted, and yet even so... I had to carry on. As if the taint was addictive. And it was, oh it was! Yet not in such a way that I could sate myself by emptying her. I had to feed on her just so much, and no more. Then I laid her down amidst the rubbish, still conscious, still staring at my eyes, my mouth, my teeth, and instead of racing away I sat by her. Thus I witnessed her recovery, the start of her revival. In the rose-hued light of dawn I saw the first hint of bloom in her white cheeks again. That was merely a visual coincidence, but she knew, and I knew--that I had cured her.

I also knew that I had acquired a taste for the taint; that I was inflexibly addicted, as surely as if the inclination had been locked away in me long ago, and now the door was open.

It only gradually dawned on me that my powers of recuperation were fading away, that my own flesh was beginning to age, that injuries could prove fatal, that I was no longer immortal.

I do not mean that I am sick. I am not. Simply, that in another thirty, forty years I shall die just as anyone else has ever died throughout history, of a heart attack, or cancer, or an accident, whatever.

Meanwhile I feed, and I cure.

Do you think I should present myself to what's left of a government, with its camps and convoys and generators and laboratories? Present myself as a living serum source, to be drained in my own turn, to be milked as carefully as the last cow in the world, my blood to be centrifuged, packaged and injected? The most valuable resource ever, eh? The most precious protected prisoner, strait-jacketed in case I do myself harm--until, who knows, I *do* become insane? My new victims carried to me and held to my lips day by day, to cure them and renew my curing blood.

That would be hateful. Supposing I was believed.

No camps for your vampire. That's totally against my nature. Like some Johnny Appleseed I roam the shattered land instead, on and on, planting healthy immunity, slowly growing older and wearier, Saint Adrien of the magic teeth. Every day that I feed, the world dies a little less, another flower of hope can be born.

Galbinus was right: I am the unreadable message that maps on to the other, unbreakable code--of the death virus. The one cancelling the other, darkness cancelling darkness. And I must carry on till the night that gripped me in that wood seven hundred years ago claims me back at last... though then it will be a different sort of night.

Why don't you throw down that knife, little lady? Your blade could hurt me, now that I'm a person like yourself. The wounds might cause me problems.

Make no mistake, I'm still strong. If I'm obliged, I shall disarm you, so there's really no value in that knife. I'd rather not risk a wound, though.

Why can't you trust me? It's tragically true that nowadays many forms of sexual fetichism and displacement flourish--at arm's length!--amongst those whose libido is still rampant. Mirrors, rubber muffs and dildo dolls. Mutual bestiality. Fixation on a partner's socks. Oh I have heard tales told, and seen sights. I know this! Am I proposing to seize you at arm's length without ever touching your flesh? Quite the opposite! In that case, why should I be one of those fetishists? What possible breed of pervert nowadays would wish to sup another person's blood?

Naturally you haven't heard of my cure. Those whom I cure only acknowledge the fact to their own kind, after I point the way. They are the future, not those dupes in government reservations. You can be the future too. Indeed you *shall* be, and soon! When you meet another of the Cured, you can both have a baby together. You can repopulate the world.

Once I have drunk a little from you. After one sharp bite. So let me have my will of you. Toss away that knife. Please. I'm asking nicely. ●

British author Ian Watson is the author of books too numerous to mention in this tiny space.

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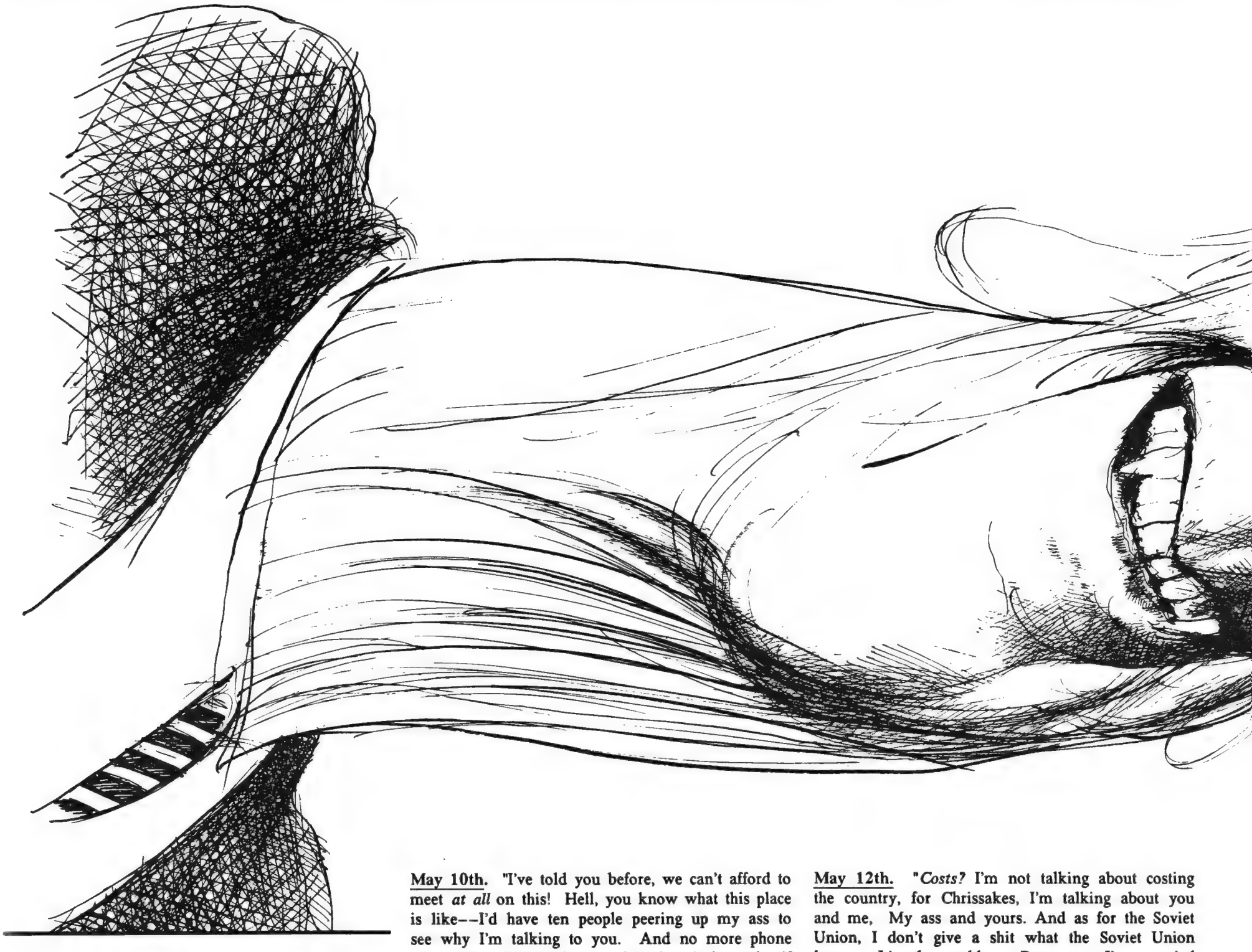


SAVED FROM THE SHREDDER

fiction by
CHARLES SHEFFIELD

illustration by
RICHARD THOMPSON

May 10th. "I've told you before, we can't afford to meet *at all* on this! Hell, you know what this place is like--I'd have ten people peering up my ass to see why I'm talking to you. And no more phone calls! Every fucking line in this place is bugged--if it's not the Russkies, it's those bastards out at NSA. We'll have to do it this way, handing messages to each other. And *shred this*, you bugger, as soon as you've read it. Shred all my messages--I'm doing the same for yours. Right? Now, I hear you, but I don't know what proof there is. You say he has AIDS. All right, where did you hear it? Is it from NIH? If it is..."

May 11th. "...how am I supposed to know who he got it from? Rock Hudson, Liberace, Clint Eastwood--who knows? Hell, you know show business. And who *cares*. Thing is, we can't let anyone know--not even the rest of the White House staff. And we've got to *DO SOMETHING*. Don't let's get caught up in that shit about it being incurable. You get it, or I get it, it's incurable. We die. But when the Prez gets it, we goddamned have to *find* a cure. Even if it costs a billion. Remember, Harry, that's just one B-1 bomber. If we don't get our shit together, this costs you and me a hell of a lot more than one lousy B-1. Go do some research. Who's the top AIDS guy in the country? Get him, talk to him, find out how we can get a cure..."

May 12th. "*Costs?* I'm not talking about costing the country, for Chrissakes, I'm talking about you and me, My ass and yours. And as for the Soviet Union, I don't give a shit what the Soviet Union knows. It's the goddam *Democrats* I'm worried about. If they find out what's wrong with old Ronnie, you might as well go and stick your head down the toilet, because that way you'll be in the right place to say goodbye to your political career. I'm telling you, Harry, we have to find a *treatment* for him. There must be a thousand people who think they can cure AIDS. Get out there, beat the bushes. I can't do it, not with my job here."

May 16th. "We-e-e-ll. That's better. I must admit I didn't expect that, I thought those shitheads out at NIH all said that it was a no-hope deal. Reinecker, the name was? I never heard of him, either. Tell me more about the guy. Maybe I should see him too. I don't want to, but things are getting *desperate*. We have to act fast, before that old bum-bandit does for the whole damned Cabinet. I think he already got Weinberger--the guy's looking a bit less tight-assed these days. And who knows who else? How about tomorrow, say, five o'clock, for Reinecker? But for God's sake don't come with him. We can't be seen together--send him along on his own. I'll talk to him."

May 17th. "Jesus, Harry, where did you find him?

You were right, for once in your life. He's a *weirdo*, and I do mean weird. And he smells like *shit*. Does he always dress like that? Where has he been living? In an underground sewer? Well, forget that. Question is, does he have something, or doesn't he? I'll tell you, I didn't understand more than two words of all that horseshit you gave me about T-cell boosters. He says his T-cells in Ronnie's body will counteract the AIDS virus. Sounds great, sure--but what the fuck's a T-cell?"

May 18th. "Peptide T and lentiviruses and T4 lymphocytes and retrovirus inhibitors--it's gibberish, Harry. I don't care *what* you call it. You can tell me you understand that stuff, but it's still all garbage to me. And it *doesn't matter*. We're running out of time. I don't care if Reinecker cures old Ronnie, or if he kills the old bugger. *Anything's* better than what we have. Think of the headlines! PRESIDENT DIAGNOSED AS AIDS PATIENT. ONE THIRD OF WHITE HOUSE INFECTED. How's that grab you? The Democrats will bury us upside down in camel shit at the polls. We have to take a *chance* with old Reinecker, see what he can do. He says he can boost the T-cells of the immune system so they can resist AIDS. Fine. I still don't know what his T-cell boosters talk means, but frankly my dear, I don't give a toss. He says he has a cure, and that's plenty good enough for me. And I don't even want to *listen* when you talk about side effects. Tell me when Reinecker has to have his session with old Ronnie; I'll make sure the Prez is available. And do it *soon*, before the shit hits."

May 20th. "Side effects. SIDE EFFECTS. Christ, you call *those* the side effects of a cure? You're a moron, Harry, a total fucking moron. That's not side effects, that's total disaster. If you'd told me, I'd never have left Reinecker within a mile of the President. Sure, you said the cure would bring extended life span, lowered body temperature, dental problems, some allergic reactions. But how was I *supposed* to interpret that? I'm not a doctor. We're in it now, Harry, we have to carry it all the way. And we *have* to stop it here. You asked what could be worse for a good Republican than a Republican President and a Cabinet with AIDS. Well, I can tell you.

"Meet me outside the President's bedroom at eleven. He'll be sleeping then. I don't know if he got Nancy, too, but we have to assume he did. You bring the cross and the hammer. I'll bring the sharpened stakes..." ●

About nine o'clock one Friday evening in the spring of 1987, I read President Reagan's first official speech on AIDS. I was absolutely appalled, and also infuriated. He was opposed to any use of government funds for education. Instead he preached celibacy, virginity, and monogamy. I fumed, went out on the porch, and wrote this little enraged piece in the next thirty minutes.

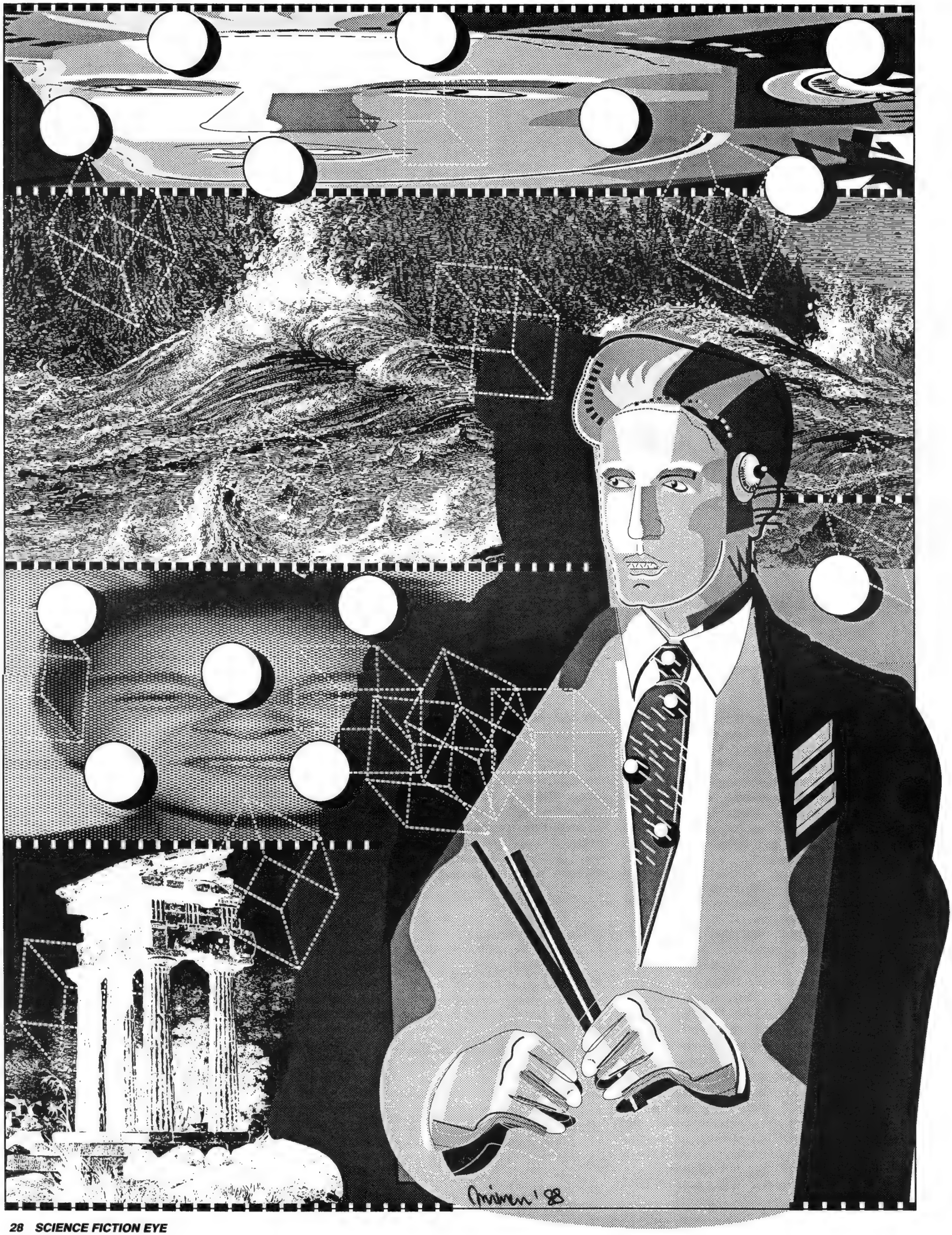
The official government position has come a long way since then, and is even approaching rationality. But I want to say a few unprompted words on behalf of the Surgeon General, Everett Koop. When he was originally appointed to the office I couldn't think of enough bad things to say about him. He seemed opposed to everything I approved of in public health, and he looked like a religious maniac, totally conservative in the worst sense.

The arrival of AIDS redeemed him completely in my eyes. I now think he is one of the few public heroes of this administration. He recognized the terrible seriousness of the epidemic, put his job as the public health leader of this country above his politics, and campaigned long and hard for government education, increased research funds, and non-discriminatory testing.

AIDS may finally get us all. If it does not, it will be no thanks to Ronald Reagan, and much thanks to people like Everett Koop.

PS: I'm not related to Koop, I've never met him, and I don't know what he did before he became Surgeon General. Also, I don't care. He rose to his job.

Charles Sheffield



PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

fiction by KATHE KOJA

illustration by MAREK MINECKI

I went back to Athens and nobody knew me. Which was fine, from a business point of view, but kind of strange--there was so much I remembered, and none of it remembered me.

Like the kiosks--everywhere, now as then, painted ugly neon pinks and vomit-greens, selling everything you didn't need. The vendors were just like I remembered, taking money with the disdain usually reserved for maitre d's or highclass credit brokers, cheap radios blasting bad popmusik behind their counters, all their goods (thin T-shirts, plastic jewelry, city directories that spoke a bad patois of English and Japanese, image cubes of the Top Ten performances of last week or last month dancing frozen inside) filmed with the eternal greasy sheen of Athens' filthy air and neverending moisture. Once Athens was a factory town, but its current incarnation as artists' colony hadn't made it any cleaner; now it was dirty in two different ways.

Which was okay by me; I'm not scared of dirt. If I was, I couldn't do my job. Back when I worked for Cubistcorp, signing up imagists, I'd been called a lot of things. Now that I was under contract to an arm--a long arm, with very sticky fingers--of Akiro International, the big boys of the gentechs, I was called a lot worse: "black-marketeer" being the kindest. Screw 'em. Guy's gotta make a buck, right?

And it wasn't as if Akiro was the only corporation chasing down the rogue gene that made imagists do the thing they did; there were at least fifty others, gentechs and holo studios and even cubecorps doing the same thing, only maybe not so strenuously. Or so efficiently. If there ever was a breakthrough--and there would be--Akiro would be the one to make it.

They'd been on the trail for a long, long time, almost from the beginning, when the Russian lab that'd been playing with psionics suffered first a virus leak and then a particularly nasty lock-the-barn-door explosion. The blast destroyed all the records (but not, of course, the virus it was intended to stop; it was already too late for that) that might have explained just how an experiment in psionic-based visualization enhancement could lead to people making pictures, real pictures, realer than any holos, with just their minds and the spoken word. The Russkies denied the whole thing, naturally, which made them look pretty stupid when the virus started its slow creep through the population. Most were unaffected; the rest fell into three categories that became more sharply defined as the gene passed through the three generations since the accident. Group one was barely capable, and then only on a party-trick level. Group two could make the pictures, but had no dependable skill level. Group three was the real thing: kiddy cartoons vs. flat pics vs. holo-quality Rembrandts, and it was the Rembrandts everyone--including Akiro, thus including me--was after.

And when I say after, I mean *after*. Akiro could be considered gentle, since all they--we--do is scan. And scanning doesn't really work, not like the shit they do in the government Cleanup clinics, where they strip you bare from the inside out and use scrambling drugs that make the boosters sold by the streetcorner pharmies look like sugar candy. Scanning's a lot simpler, and a lot less time-consuming, and it doesn't permanently mess you up like scrambling does. Well, not usually, but hey, there're risks in every biz. And Akiro pays well for whatever wear-and-tear they inflict. Up front, too, which I think is pretty decent of them. Some of our clients don't know enough, afterwards, to ask for their money, but we pay 'em anyway. It's the only way to deal: keep your rep clean.

Me and my clean rep stopped at a stand for a cone of Eagle beer and a couple of pitas, then sat on the boardwalk to watch the traffic. The artists of Athens were mostly young, mostly imagists. Their pictures shimmered in the air, showing at a glance who the real players were; you could, if your eye was sharp enough, detect not only the skill level--that was easy--but see who was boosting and who wasn't. You could even, if you were very sharp, tell who'd been scanned and how long ago. The real sad cases were the scramblers, hanging on and hoping that somehow, maybe, it might come back. It never did, and invariably they left. But new kids showed up every day, confident and rubbernecking, Kim Soo T-shirts and big black earrings; same old Athens.

After the beer and pitas, a hotel was next. Motel Hotel was still more or less standing, so I went there, registering as John Wu, making sure my room fronted on the boardwalk. The desk clerk didn't waste a glance on my black gripbag with its knobs and dents and bulges, which was fine with me.

Upstairs I locked, then seal-locked, the door (no great protection, but a warning at least--about all you could expect from a portable unit) then went about setting up shop. Portalabs don't take up much space. When that was done, I called Karole.

"Herr Wingate," she said, in that carefully-constructed Midamerican voice. She was filing her nails with something that looked illegal. "I see your trip was uneventful."

"I'm John Wu today," I told her. "You want me to start right in, or get the feel of things first?"

"Time is money. The more time, the less money. Remember?"

"We've got a contract. Remember?"

"Sue me." she said, and broke screen.

Fine. I changed clothes--the gray jacket and knicks I'd worn in made me look like a fed--and went back to the boardwalk. It was hotter now, and the traffic'd slowed down some. A cube kiosk was the place to start, so I found the one with the highest prices and cleanest cubes and started checking out the merchandise.

"Hey you," said the countergirl, who looked like a twelve-year-old, a mean twelve-year-old, "you fingerprint, you buy."

"Who did this one?" I held up an end-of-the-world scene, like Bosch on bad scramble. "It's nice."

"Right there on the bottom." She tapped one dirty red nail on the etched signature: Glowworm and Jones. "They're hot right now," she said.

"How much?"

She named a price and I laughed. The art of dickering was still alive and well in Athens, and I beat her down a couple of credits. The cube in my pocket, I went strolling, wishing I'd waited to get my hair cut; the sun was already burning the back of my neck.

Most of the other cubesellers had work by Glowworm and Jonas, all of it high-priced even by tourist standards. I traded the cube I'd bought for two cheaper ones, one a Tokyo landscape, the other a nude couple dancing to a Raybons song. The audio quality was above average. I remarked on it. "Yeah," the seller said, a fat little guy with yellow teeth, "Those two, they're the best. You ever see 'em?" No, I said. He named a picture-bar, one I didn't know, but all p-bars are the same, in Athens or anywhere else: where the imagists go to work, to play, to show off and hang out--the great spawning ground for hotshot reps. The guy gave me directions, and I bought another cube, just to be nice, I said. He was till laughing when I walked away.

I went back to the Motel and slept a while, until dark. My neck was sunburned, and the tube of skin cream I found in the bathroom only made it worse. I changed clothes again, green slitpants and a fatigue vest with fifteen useful little pockets, and sealed the door from the outside when I left.

The p-bar, Windy's, wasn't hard to find, but it was ugly: a blue-green bunker, neck-breaking steps, and already too crowded. I couldn't get a table so I sat at the bar and ordered two Eagles. I sipped as I watched the tabletalk--the imagists' slangy caricature shorthand used mostly among themselves.

It was pretty good, a much better class than the bar itself would suggest, and very little of it boosted. I caught a couple, one of them a scrambler

whose tabletalk seemed familiar: a guy and a woman with identical blue butch cuts and highcut black jeans. The woman used a fake French accent and waved her hands a lot, while the guy just sat there getting drunker and drunker. I told the bargirl to send over a round. When the drinks made the table, they both glanced at me, and the woman waved.

"Hi," I said, coming to stand behind her chair, "Hot in here tonight, isn't it?"

"Could get hotter," she said, forgetting to sound French. "Pull up a seat, why don't you?" The guy frowned at both of us but made room for me to sit between them. "You here for the show?"

"What I'm really trying to do is catch up with a friend. Maybe you know her. Lissa Karsinki?" Lissa had been dead for three years, but at one time she had all of Athens by the balls. Maybe her name was still good for something.

The man frowned again. "Lissa's gone," he said.

"Really? When?"

"Couple three years, I dunno. Who're you, anyway?"

"My name's John Wu," I said, to the woman. "Cubistcorp."

"Woo woo," she said around a giggle, and drank deep, letting her leg sag so it touched mine under the table. I remembered her then: Ginny Force. When I last saw her she was hot stuff, not in Lissa's league, but still good quality, a sure bet to break out of the artists' ghetto into bigtime work. And now she was a scrambler. Tough old world.

"I knew Lissa," she told me. "She's--she died, you know. Took a vacation and died."

"No, I--I didn't know." I still remembered the date, remembered where I was when they told me that Lissa's vacation (imagist slang for a stay in a Cleanup clinic) was over for good. Two weeks later I signed on with Cubistcorp. Six months after that I met Karole's group, though I hadn't known Karole then, or she me, and told CC where it could stick its cubes. One of the best decisions I ever made. Karole's bunch could be a pain in the ass but their creditchips were solid gold, and nothing they ever handed me was too hard, or took too long. Which was fine with me. I've never had what you'd call a long attention span.

"My name's Ginny," said Ginny. "I took a vacation too, but it didn't kill me."

"Too bad," the man said. He left the table, walking a drunken line to the men's room. Ginny grinned after him. "Jojo's pissed," she said. "He's had the hots for Jones for a long time, but she thinks he's dogfood."

"They're on tonight, aren't they?" But she didn't hear me because just then the lights went down and a skinny guy with a big shock of bright dyed hair hopped onstage and hollered: "The cabaret visions of Glowworm and Jones!" Lots of genuine applause, people settling back in their seats, the better to watch. Ginny pressed her leg tighter against mine, but I pretended not to feel it. I slipped my hand into a vestpocket and fingered the cubes there.

Jones came out first--tall, long muscled legs, white snapsuit dazzling with her dark hair and dark skin. Her voice was husky, and it projected all the way to the back where I sat: a voice like silk and whiskey.

"Good evening," she said, "and welcome to Windy's." She nodded stage right and out came a man in black leather and red boots, almost as tall as she, his blond hair in long braids beaded with tiny plastic musical notes that glittered in the light. "He's Glowworm," she said, and her smile was only for him, "and I'm Jones."

"Tonight we're here to talk about love," said Glowworm, a hint of drawl in his voice, one hand on Jones' shoulder. "Love . . . " and a fat red heart, Valentine-big and frilly, began to pulse a few inches above Jones' head. "Love and lust." The heart separated into a little red couple, who kissed, pressed together, their bodies swaying just a bit. "A combination hard to find and hard to beat."

"We look for it," Jones said, her voice deeper still, a second couple joining the first, "hoping to find the poetry and the motion, hoping--"

"To know--"

"What we cannot know."

"To feel--"

"What no one has ever felt."

Back and forth they went, and before long the air was rich with tiny couples, dancing, kissing, making love, rainbow colors and perfect detail, and Glowworm and Jones swayed in time to their pictures' dance, their voices a duet, simple enough to complement, tricky enough to show how good they were, the rhythm erotic. Beside me Ginny was breathing hard. I felt my body stirring, but not from her. Keep your mind on business, I told myself. No fun allowed.

They were damn good, though, to make even me think that way, even for a minute. I saw why Karole and Akiro, were so very interested in them. When the show was over I excused myself to Ginny. She wasn't too happy about it, but screw her. She wasn't paying my tab. She gave me a funny look as I left the table.

Back at the bar I told the bargirl to send a bottle of black kir to Glowworm and Jones, compliments of John Wu, here's my card.

"Generous, aren't you?" the bargirl said. We both knew she was fishing. I gave her a couple of extra digits on the chip and she brightened right up, told me she'd take the bottle back personally, and if I'd just hang around, well then, maybe. "You're biz, I know," she said, "and normally we don't like biz here, you know? Tends to fuck up the atmosphere. But you're okay."

I kept to my spot and sure enough she was back, nodding to the door behind the bar. "Through there, and up one."

Easy, easy, all of it. I was beginning to think I might be able to get a bonus out of Karole, who could be appreciative if you twisted her arm hard enough. I knocked, gently, and said: "Hi, it's John Wu. May I come in?"

"No sale." Jones' voice, harsher than onstage, but still silk. There were mutterings back and forth, and something small and bright flashed inside the room. I saw its glow beneath the door. Glowworm spoke next: "C'mon in, Mr. Wu."

They already had the kir open. "Sit down," Glowworm said. "Care for a drink?"

"Sure." I took a paper cone's worth. Jones sat at a mirror-table, combing her hair, the top two snaps on her suit undone. Glowworm half-lay on the wide window ledge, one knee up, six tiny picture-globes dancing lazily over his head.

"What brings you here, Mr. Wu-from-Cubistcorp, as if we didn't already know." Jones put the comb down and turned to give me a nasty, nasty smile. God, she was pretty. "We don't deal with bizmen, Mr. Wu, especially bizmen who think they can buy us with a bottle of booze."

"Slow down, okay?" I spread open my hands; nothing up my sleeve. "I just wanted to congratulate you on a great show."

"Uh huh. Didn't come to talk about cube costs or distribution rates or anything like that, right?" She picked up the comb again and tapped it in irritating doubletime rhythm with Glowworm's circling globes. "Look, Mr. Wu, we don't need you, okay? We make our own cubes and we sell them ourselves and that's just the way we like it."

I wished Glowworm would talk. I could tell already he'd be easier to deal with. "I understand," I said. "If you don't want to talk cubes, fine."

The comb quit tapping and she looked me in the eye. "Then what do you want?"

"Just to congratulate you, that's all."

"My ass."

I shrugged. "If you feel that way . . . "

Finally Glowworm spoke. "C'mon," to Jones, cajolingly, "be nice. The guy did buy us a bottle."

"I can buy my own drinks." She started combing her hair again, gazing in the mirror as if I'd disappeared like a bad image. "Get out, Mr. Wu."

Okay. No bonus. Just the usual push-and-grind, maybe even harder this time. Jones was a real chromeplated bitch. She reminded me a little of Karole. "Okay," I said, "fine."

I was halfway down the stairs when Glowworm stopped me. "Listen," he said, "she's in kind of a bad mood tonight. And she doesn't like to be pitched to. But me, I'm a little easier."

"Well, I appreciate that." We went back down to the bar, and I ordered more kir. "I was down on the boardwalk today, shopping at the kiosks." I showed him the cubes I'd bought. "This is fine work," I said, and meant it. "Are you firm about not wanting distribution help?" I didn't mean that, naturally, but how could he know?

"'Fraid so," he said, smiling a little at the cubes. "What you have to understand, Mr. Wu . . . "

"John."

"John, then. Thing is, we've seen a lot of people get burned, and not just moneywise. Not everybody's what they seem, you know?" He was starting to slur. The kir was getting to him.

"I'm sorry you think that," I said, earnest-eyed, palms flat on the table. "I like to play straight with my clients."

"No offense, but we've heard that before." He tipped the last of the new bottle into his glass. I ordered another one. "You're a real good loser, aren't you?"

"The best."

It took me another half-bottle to get him to agree to a meet, without Jones and her mouth, the next day. I left him with what was left of the kir and went back to my room, where I slept for twelve straight hours. When I woke up I called Karole, but she wasn't in. I left a message and went back to sleep. The implant in my wrist started throbbing an hour later. I sat up, switched on the screen to Karole's careful face. She wore a pair of smoky halfglasses that made her look even meaner than usual.

"You're very quick," she said. "When can you have the scans completed?"

"Scam, did you say?"

Karole has no sense of humor. "Answer the question, Herr Wu."

"Depends. If you want just the guy, probably tonight. But once he's done, I'd have no chance at all with the girl. If you want them both, there's no saying. She's a real hard sell."

"So am I."

"Hey, I'm doing the best I can."

Silence. She tapped a finger against her cheek. "I can authorize a few more units of credit, but beyond that?" She shrugged.

"Whatever works."

"Use your own judgement." She broke screen, and I checked the equipment again: scan–ready. From out of my gripbag I took the Gordon and a few extra rounds, and slid them into the chest–pocket of my white linen jacket. The Gordon went into its shoulder holster, as usual. I didn't think I'd be needing it, but you never know.

I had time to kill before the meet with Glow–worm, and I spent it down past the boardwalk, watching the pharmies selling boosters. Most of their clientele weren't real imagists. The good ones didn't need it, and the bad ones couldn't be helped by it. The pharmies made their money off the scramblers, who wanted back what they'd lost so badly they'd try anything, any bathtub mix, just for the hope of it. Never worked, of course.

Glowworm showed up late and furtive, braids stuffed into a flat purple ganjacap and wearing big shades. "Hi," he said. "Jones's back at the place. I told her I was going out for beer."

"Keeps you on a pretty short leash, does she?"

He didn't like that, as I'd known he wouldn't. "Sometimes we don't agree on the best way to do things," he said, a little stiff. "But we're partners, you know? She's okay. Just a little stubborn some–times."

"I know what you mean." I lit a cigarette and offered him one. He shook his head. "Bad for the pipes," he said.

We watched the pharmies for a while, and then he nudged me. "Look, you wanna deal, or what?"

"Let's talk. You first."

"Okay." He took a breath, a big one. "Here's how it is," he said, pushing the shades up, a little nervous whorl of red and black going around and around, around and around above his head. "Some–times I play a number or two, you know, with the Shido guys. Mostly I win, but sometimes I don.t."

"And Jones doesn't know about it."

"Right. And I want to keep it that way, okay? She doesn't exactly approve of gambling." Around and around went the whorls. "Well, I haven't been winning too much lately, and my credit's about shot. The Shidos are pretty patient, but I know it won't last. So I need a unit or two, to keep going. Pretty soon I'm gonna crack the fucking thing anyway, and once I do that, the winning'll never stop. It's just 'till then, you know?"

Oldest gambler's cry in the world: I've Got A System. Which is why running numbers has always been profitable. "I understand," I told him. "But now it's time for you to understand something. I need for Jones to be in on this too."

"No way. You deal with me or not at all."

"I'm authorized to offer you twice the figure I named last night."

"For cubing?" He pulled his shades up and stared at me. "Come on, there's more to it than that."

"You're absolutely right," I said. "Look here." I don't think he felt the syringe at all.

I waited a couple of hours before calling Jones. I found the number in Glowworm's tagbook, though why anybody would carry around their own number is beyond me. She was cat–nervous onscreen and didn't look any happier when she saw me.

"Don't tell me," she said. "He's with you, right?"

"Right." And a hell of a time I'd had, too, dragging him back to Motel, mumbling loudly all the while about no–good shitass drunks to any passerby with ears. He was heavier than he looked, the bastard. When I clipped the leads on and scanned him, he was till out, which makes it harder, but not impossible. Very few things in life are impossible.

"Put him on," Jones said. I could see her pictures, tiny nooses and guns and knives skittering in a cloud of angry yellow sparks. She was mad enough to shit iron. "I want to talk to him."

"No can do," I said. "He's sleeping."

The pictures froze, and her eyes changed: ugly. "What do you mean, sleeping?"

"Fact is, he's sleeping pretty deep. How deep is up to you."

It only took a minute. "Where are you?"

"Hotel Motel, room 49. Second floor. Knock first or the door'll fry you, and that would be a waste."

"You're real cute, aren't you, shithead?" She was breathing like she was in pain, a whole thun–derstorm over her head, pointed at me. "If you hurt him..."

"I told you, babe, that's up to you."

"I'm on my way."

I loaded up the Gordon and sat on the edge of the bed, waiting, watching Glowworm twitch and snore. Shame, but it looked like he was going to be one of the ones who took it hard. Too bad it wasn't the other way around––old Jones was defi–nitely going to be bad news. But, as Karole keeps telling me, that's what I'm paid for.

It wasn't long before she knocked, hard. "It's me," she said, much too loudly. "Open the door."

The doorseal blinked for two bodies, not one. "I see you've brought along a friend."

"You never said not to."

What to do, what to do. "I'm going to scan for arms, now." I said, dialing up the Gordon, glancing at the door in case they were stupid enough to grandstand. "If you're clean you can come in, but your friend's gotta wait in the hall." The scan came up neg for both of them, but just to be sure I ran it twice. Neg again, which was about what I ex–pected, so slowly and cautiously, I opened the door. "Easy now," I said, "easy there, Jones, old pal."

The door hit me, surprisingly hard, and "I'm not Jones," and there was Ginny Force, with seven inches of some weird ceramic razor in my face. "Now *you* be easy, pal." Those portable scans weren't worth shit half the time. Like now. Cera–mics, for God's sake.

Jones slammed in behind Ginny, kicked the door shut, and turned on me like a mamma bear. "What did you do to him, Mr. Wu?" She had tears on her face, and wouldn't look directly at Glow–worm, who was still twitching away in his corner. "Talk *very* fast."

"Mr. Wu my ass," Ginny said. "I remember you, Jerry. Jerry Wingate," she said to Jones, "I told you it was him." Under the scramble–haze there was a kind of triumph, but most of all there was con–tempt, rich and smelly and real. "You always were a shit, Jerry, even way back when you were living with Lissa. A real gold–plated shit." The razor touched me, not too lightly. Her hands were shak–ing. "For two cents I'd slit you open."

"Not yet," Jones said. "What did you do to him, Wu or Wingate or whatever your name is?"

"Just put him out, that's all. How else could I get you to talk to me?" Ordinarily I'dve taken my chances with Ginny, but not with Jones as backup––her razor was just as long, and the look in her eyes was definitely nuts.

"What did you *do* to him, you son of a bitch?"

Ginny cocked her head, listening to the funny little noises Glowworm was making. "He scanned him," she said, not loud as I expected, but dull, flat, like telling a stale joke. "He scanned him, Jo."

"Cut him."

She did, but not too hard or too deep. Ama–teur. My throat started to bleed and I slapped her, hard, in the temple, and she went down, a surprised look in her eyes, like, how can a dead man hit so hard? I went not for Jones, but for Glowworm, put the Gordon to his head. "I'll kill him right now if you don't put that razor down."

She dropped it right away. "All this," like she couldn't believe it. "All this, for a stupid scan. a *scan!* Why? There're lots of others . . . "

"You two are very, very good. Good enough for us to know your names, and we wanted to know a little more. That's all." All I was going to tell her, anyway. My throat hurt like hell. I was going to have to do something about it pretty quick. "But you're not worth bleeding to death, not to me, anyway. You just kick that razor over here and you can take your buddy and go." I owed him money, too, but I wasn't about to pay it. "He's the one I really wanted, anyway."

"Liar." She was really crying now. "Shithead liar." She grabbed Glowworm under the armpits and dragged him off. I heard her huffing and puffing in the hall as I went for the aid kit, kicking Ginny's razor past her as she went, hands–and–knees dazed, to the door. Who'd have ever thought the bitch would remember me? She was a scramble case, and Lissa was such a long time ago. Bad luck, that's what it was, just bad fucking luck.

I tried to tell Karole that, the next morning, but she wasn't any too pleased. "At least you were able to get one," she said. "But Jones' pitch was better, her force was higher. Definitely the more interesting of the two." She stared at me as if she'dve liked to pop the sutures on my throat. "Regrettable."

"Fixable." I said. "Who's our Cleanup contact here?"

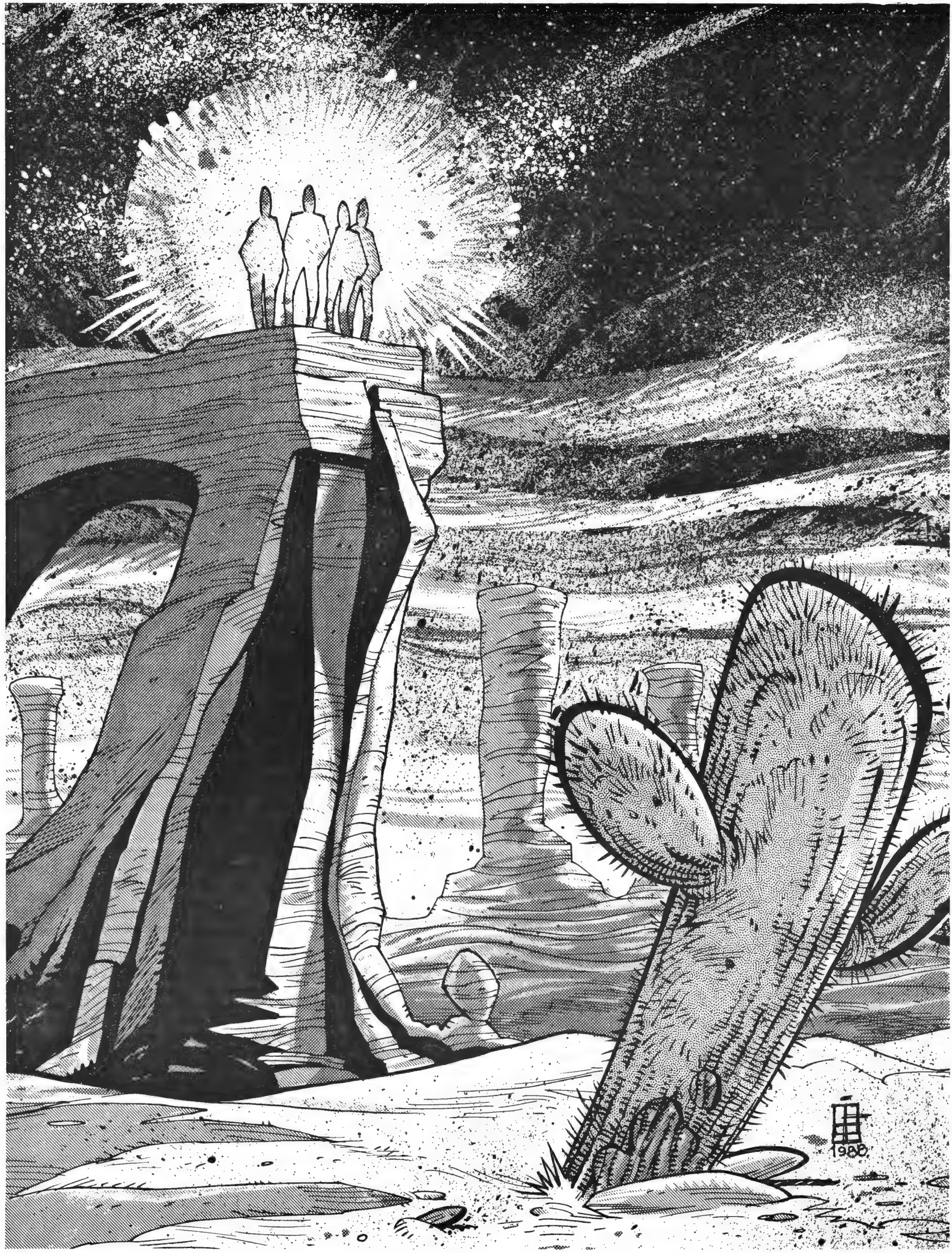
"In Athens it's Joseph Rogan. He goes by––let me see––he goes by the name of Jojo."

"Fine." And it was, too. "One way or another, you'll get Jones."

"*Very* good." For a minute she looked almost human. "I trust you're not seriously injured?"

"Bad enough to get hazard–pay," I said, and for once broke screen before she did. I hate to be a bastard, I really do, but I'm a pro. I wonder if Ginny remembers that? ●

Kathe Koja is a new writer just beginning her career. Hopefully, her next sale will be for money.


1988

THE JONES CONTINUUM

fiction by PAUL DI FILIPPO

illustration by DAN STEFFAN

Carr tunes the snap generator with exquisite precision. He feels almost like an integrated component of his creation. His nimble fingers nudge the slide controls on the crackle-finished main console up and down, like the delicate digits of a record producer seeking to obtain the proper sound mix for some merry pop melody. Ruby LED displays flicker through an infinity of interdimensional coordinates, before finally being locked onto the proper set. Seemingly relieved, Carr unbends from over the large bank of controls.

Carr and his console occupy the middle of a converted soundstage somewhere in California. This commandeered facility, chosen for reasons of security and subterfuge, is large and desolate-feeling, housing the ghosts of actors, directors and cameramen, and their fictional realities. Carr is suddenly struck by how fitting this setting is, in terms of their attempt to breach an alternate worldline. The huge space traps and alters sound oddly. Carr and his busy crew fill only a small portion of the high-ceilinged building. Cables snake across the cement floor from console to portal to mainframes. Big kleigs on telescoping shafts with tripod feet light the scene harshly. Shadows lurk beyond the perimeter thus defined.

Men and women--dressed like Carr in sexless antiseptic white "bunny-suits," complete with close-fitting hoods--monitor various instruments and convey hushed instructions from one station to another through headphones and pin-mikes. Lurking back in the shadows are a cluster of officers wearing the various uniforms of the U.S. Armed Forces. They are not half so creepily impressive, however, as the assorted plain-clothes observers, who Carr knows represent more secretive and powerful branches of the government.

Carr wipes cold sweat from his brow. So much is riding on this one mission. His reputation, years of hard work, further grants... He'd prefer to be going through the portal himself, but that's impossible. As the inventor of the snap, he's too valuable to risk. No, the success of all his efforts ride on the performance of the select team standing nervously by the portal. These four men and one woman have been selected and certified by ranks of government experts. If anyone can deal with the unknown terrain that lies beyond the portal and establish a beachhead for democracy, it is these five cross-dimensional explorers.

Leaving his console, Carr walks to the group.

Jones is their leader. Solid, responsible Jones, his looks as All-American as his name. Carr finds it odd, how these types always seem to spring up, ready to lead, when the nation needs them. Glenn, Armstrong, and now Jones, another from the same mold. He's a big man, made to appear even taller and bulkier by his outfit. Like the rest of his party, Jones wears, over his desert-camouflage fatigues, segmented plates of Kevlar body-armor, bound to a loose aramid mesh substrate that will allow ventilation in the hot environment they expect to encounter. Combat boots add an inch to Jones' height. Weapons and supplies are strapped across his back and chest, hang from hips and waist. Fragmentation grenades, food concentrates, a canteen, medipak, the latest rapid-fire rifle with laser-sights...

Carr lays a hand on Jones' armored shoulder. "Well, Charles, I guess this is it. There's not much I can say now, except 'Good luck.'"

Jones' voice is firm. "We couldn't ask for a better base team--or mission head, Phil. Just make sure you have the portal open at the right time, and we'll do the rest."

Carr knows he wanted to say a hundred things at this point, but has forgotten every last one in the excitement. All he can remember is a final admonition.

"Remember, we're fairly certain that the physical laws in this universe are different from ours. All the theoretical work indicates there will be a deviation from our own continuum. Nothing major at the quantum level--Planck's Constant and all that crap should be identical to ours down to a few dozen decimal places. But those accumulated small discrepancies may amount to macroscopic differences which we can't predict. You'll have to move cautiously. All we know is that life is possible there. You know all our test animals returned unharmed..."

Skinny Kent interrupts, his voice nervous. "What about those weird results with the higher animals?"

"Right, Tom, right. That monkey and cat did return with initial behavior abnormalities, but those cleared up soon after. We now suspect that most of their atypical behavior derived from sharing the same cage, albeit with a glass divider. However, just to be sure, you've got your various psychotropic stabilizers. Take them as Doctor Benson advises."

Carr nods to the lone female expedition member. Doctor Benson smiles weakly, her hands fidgeting with the plastic catch that holds her belt of grenades. She squeezes the twin prongs to release the catch, clicks it shut, releases it, clicks it shut, releases--

Suddenly realizing that the sound is mimicking the large snap that will signal their departure, Benson forces her hands to hang laxly by her side.

They are all uneasy, Carr included, and Jones, in his leaderly manner, takes over.

"Let's do it, then."

Carr shakes hands all around. "Charles, Tom, Mike, Heather, George. Our hearts go with you. Oh, yes--the President sends his best wishes too. Well--see you back here at oh-nine-hundred on the dot."

Carr heads back to his station. When he turns to face the portal, he sees that the explorers have mounted the steps within the rings. The portal resembles a truncated cornucopia: a series of massive contiguous rings, each one smaller than the one before it. The first and biggest ring stands directly on the floor, while the others are supported on graduated cradles. The expeditionary team is standing single-file within the metal harvest-horn.

Removing a key from his pocket, Carr unlocks a cover to reveal a button. His finger hesitates briefly above it, then plunges down, initiating the launch sequence.

Driven now by an elaborate program running on the Cray-2 CPU's, the whole process is automatic. The whine of the snap generator increases in frequency and strength. It's almost more than Carr can stand... At last, mercifully, the noise terminates in the eponymous crack--

The annular stage is empty.

Carr looks at his watch.

Two hours till retrieval.

The team materializes on a dusty, pebble-strewn, arid patch of desert, standing in a line. The

three inner members--Benson, Kent and Blount--immediately drop into crouches. Each has his or her weapon aimed at a different point of the compass, covering a pre-assigned 120 degrees of fire. Meanwhile, Montreaux at the rear and Jones up front whip microalloyed vanadium-steel poles and hammers from their belt-clips and begin to pound them into the ground. Explosive charges prove unnecessary to split the friable earth, and the poles--which contain homing transmitters and radio-activated flares--are securely in position, marking the locus where the crew must await the re-opening of the transplenary portal.

Only when this crucial task is accomplished does the team relax somewhat. The crouching guards stand erect. At a hand-signal from Jones, they sling their rifles over their shoulders. Warily, the men and woman attempt to absorb their surroundings, here in a dimension completely removed from the entire universe of their birth.

They appear to be standing atop a large flat mesa. Beyond this tabletop stretches a landscape of canyons and arroyos, wind-carved buttes and pinnacles, titanic blocks and spires, precarious arches and natural ziggurats, red, yellow, sandy beige, brown and gray. The quiet vista is unbroken by tokens of civilization from horizon to horizon. The air is dry, the sun vibrant. Of animal life there is no sign.

"We might have popped out in a more convenient place," says Jones. "We certainly won't be able to get down off this mesa and back up in two hours. It seems our exploration will be limited to these few acres."

"That's true," says Montreaux. "Still, we're protected up here."

Kent says, "Looks kinda like Arizona."

"Yeah," says Blount, "'round Coconino County."

"Why is that name so familiar?" asks Benson.

Blount laughs. "You're showing your age, kiddo. That's where--"

"Look!" shouts Montreaux suddenly.

The others follow his outstretched finger skyward with their eyes.

A daytime moon hangs low. It is shaped like a ball of Gouda cheese with an irregular slice taken out of its dorsal side. It is as yellow as a butternut squash.

Everyone is shocked into silence, until Jones speaks.

"It must be an illusion, a trick of the atmosphere. The refractive index of the air, perhaps. No natural astronomical object could be shaped like that. Remember, Carr warned us to be alert for small differences in the physical makeup of this place."

"Whatever the explanation is," says Kent irritably, "I don't like it. Either we can't trust our senses, or the natural laws here are screwed up bad. Either way, we could be in for trouble."

"Just get a grip on yourself, Tom," admonishes Jones. "We'll be fine as long as we step carefully and hang together. Okay, let's check out the periphery of this mesa, and see if there's not an easy way down."

Adopting a patrol formation, the five move off. Jones is pointman, Blount and Benson are in second rank, and Kent and Montreaux bring up the rear.

As they move toward the edge, Jones wonders briefly if he should rearrange the pairings. Kent--always a touchy type--has had spats in the past with Montreaux, and his nervousness might trigger more today. The team cannot afford any such arguments or dissension now. However, Blount and Benson are an efficient duo. The pudgy Blount seems to have a crush on the aloof but tolerant Benson, which makes him extremely solicitous of her welfare. It would be a shame to split them up. No, to shuffle things around might be worse, cause trepidation and nerves, decides Jones. Best to leave the assignments as they are--for now.

Reaching the eastern edge of the mesa, the five halt and peer cautiously down.

The ground is hundreds and hundreds of feet below. A thin thread of blue defines a snaky river. The sides of the formation are absolutely vertical. Here, at least, there are no obvious means of safe descent.

"Okay," says Jones. "We'll circle south and inspect the whole perimeter. We might have better luck elsewhere."

They don't. A half-hour's hike around the circumference reveals that they are efficiently bottled up on this desolate mesa, with only a few large cacti for company.

Jones assembles his squad at the original spot of arrival. During the recon, the two pairs of teammates have been conversing quietly between themselves, so that Jones could not overhear. Now everyone falls silent. Overhead, the moon has impossibly crossed a full fifty degrees of the heavens in the short time they have been here,

"Well," begins Jones, "it seems we'll have a boring report to make, but sometimes that's for the best--"

"Fuck you!" shouts Kent.

Jones goggles at Kent until he realizes that Kent's expletive is directed at his partner, Montreaux, and not at Jones himself.

"Tom, get ahold of yourself. What's wrong?"

"It's this bastard Montreaux. He's been bugging me, saying stupid things, trying to burn my ass."

"George, is that true?"

"No way. It's Tom who's the instigator. He's been spouting crazy talk about how we're all gonna die here. I've been trying to calm him down."

Jones tries to ascertain which man is telling the truth, and fails. He looks for help to Doctor Benson, his second-in-command. Jones is grateful when Benson speaks up.

"All right, listen up now. This must be the onset of the psychic abnormalities the test-animals exhibited. Everyone break out their mood-stabilizers."

Following Benson's example, the four men soon hold their individually tailored neurotropin pills in one hand, unstoppered canteens in the other. At a nod from Benson, all five swallow the doses down, Kent grudgingly.

"There," says Jones gratefully, "that should do it. Now, let's split up in pairs--I'll remain here by the drop--and take some sensor readings and samples. See if you can find any traces of animal life, however simple."

His subordinates obey his orders. Jones watches them disperse, then falls to his own sampling of the ground around the poles.

A yell brings Jones out of his concentration.

Montreaux is flat on his back, Kent stride him and choking him. The really odd thing about this scene--the sight that Jones cannot initially accept--is that Montreaux's tongue extends a full twelve inches out of his mouth and is vibrating like a New Year's Eve favor, while his eyes have popped out on stalks. In addition, the victim's face is turning an unnatural royal blue.

Jones rushes toward the pair, sensing Blount and Benson close behind him.

Wrestling Kent off Montreaux, Jones drags the insane assailant to his feet and begins to shake him. When Kent seems a trifle more in possession of himself, Jones releases him.

"What the hell is the explanation for this, Tom? Why would you want to hurt George?"

Kent passes a hand across his brow. "I--I don't know. It seems I just can't stand the sight of him."

Blount and Benson have helped Montreaux up. As inexplicably as it altered, his face has returned to normal, and he seems okay. Jones moves over to examine him.

No one notices that Kent has a grenade in his hand until the pin is pulled.

Jones has time only to shout: "Down, down--!" before it lands in their midst and explodes with a roar.

The smoke clears to reveal four standing figures, centered in a carbonized sunburst of cracked ground. Their white Kevlar armor is streaked with long black trailers of soot. Their hair stands up on end. Otherwise, they are unharmed.

"I can't believe it," says Jones with utter bewilderment. "We should all be in little pieces..." Suddenly, their survival a given, an insupportable rage overtakes him, at the sight of the unrepentant Kent.

Without conscious decision, Jones makes a fist of his right hand. Gripping this fist with his left hand, he begins to screw his arm into a rubbery coil, armor and all, until it's entirely compressed at shoulder level. He advances on Kent, who quivers but does not flee. Once in proximity, Jones unleashes his fist.

The mighty blow catches Kent on the jaw. Little multicolored five-pointed stars spray out from the site of impact. Kent's head rockets back, stretching his elastic neck a full four feet. There is a *BOI-OI-OI-NG* noise. Kent's body finally catches up with his head. His feet leave the ground and he arrows twenty yards through the air. He lands in the arms of a large cactus. The arms close on him, spikes piercing through his armor. Kent screams: "Yeeee-oooow!" He shoots straight up into the air, reverses at the zenith, so that his head is pointing down, then plummets. When he hits, he piledrives into the mesa up to his waist.

Jones turns in astonishment to the other three. He barely notices that all effects of the blast have disappeared from their persons, as from his own. "I didn't mean to-- I didn't know I could--"

No one pays any attention to their leader. Blount is solicitously inquiring after Benson's post-grenade condition. Montreaux, meanwhile, is laughing at Kent's fate, doubled up in hysterics, slapping his knees. He falls to the ground, kicking his legs in the air. He rolls onto his belly, pounding the dust, wetting it with his tears, until there is a large puddle around him. He does not notice Kent's return.

Kent is dirty and full of cactus spikes, but otherwise unhurt. He unshoulders his rifle. Montreaux seems to sense his presence. He ceases laughing, looks up, makes an instant transition to his feet and starts running. Kent lets him go,

flicking his rifle to single-shot action. He draws a careful bead on Montreaux's fleeing ass and squeezes off a round. The bullet hits with a noise like a bell being rung in a sideshow shooting gallery. Montreaux jumps straight up--"Yikes!"--then resumes running. Kent begins to chase him around the mesa, stopping now and then take another potshot at his tail.

Jones does not attempt to stop them. He's scared of what he might do to them. Instead, he turns to Benson and Blount. At least they've stayed sane...

Blount is holding Benson's hand. He has somehow progressed from inquiries about the effect of the grenade on her health to fervent protestations of love, made in an atrocious Maurice Chevalier accent.

"Mah leetle pee-geon, you feel mah heart wiz love. Mwa-mwa-mwa-mwa-mwa."

This last noise accompanies Blount's kisses, which he is planting hotly up and down Benson's arm.

"Stop that! Stop that, you--you skunk! Quit it!"

Blount does not heed Benson's wishes. He grabs her waist, tips her backwards so that she is balanced on one foot, the other leg extending out in the air, and begins kissing her neck.

Benson oozes out of Blount's grip as if oiled. His arms remain in a circle, and he continues to kiss the air for several seconds after she is gone. When he notices her absence, he straightens up.

Benson has her rifle aimed at Blount's midsection. Jones notes with despair that it's on automatic.

"Don't take one step closer--" warns Benson.

"Surely you do not mean that, *ma cherie*," says Blount, and takes the fatal step.

Benson lets loose with about two hundred rounds of large-caliber ammo. Jones closes his eyes.

He opens them to see Blount pierced with holes. He is solid through and through, like a potato.

"You have caused a thirst een mah stomach, mah leetle lovebug," says Blount. He drinks from his canteen. Water spouts from all his bullet-holes like a fountain. "Now that I am refreshed, let us resume our battle of love."

Benson tosses her rifle into the air in fright and runs off. Blount drops his knuckles to the ground and pogoes unconcernedly off on all fours after her, bouncing impossibly high into the air with each "step," stopping once to sniff a cactus-flower in mid-pursuit.

Jones is left standing alone. From across the mesa drift sounds of gunfire and explosions, shrieks and shouts of triumph, interspersed with weird sound-effects: slidewhistles, crashes, echoes, reverb, racheting...

Dazed and broken-spirited, Jones trudges off.

He finds himself at the mesa's edge. He sits despondently down, legs dangling over the abyss. Reflexively, he checks his chronometer. Less than an hour until pickup. He supposes he should be returning to the rendezvous-point, but hasn't the heart. The mission is a complete failure, a total bust. How can he face Carr and the others and report what he has allowed to occur? Jones grips his head dejectedly and shakes it. There is a rattle as of marbles in a can from inside his cranium.

"BEEP-BEEP!"

Jones is hanging in midair, having made an instantaneous transition from being seated on the cliff-edge to hovering above the abyss. He has just enough time to see an impossible creature standing on the mesa behind him, fluttering its impudent tongue at him, before he realizes that there is nothing below him. He pokes the air tentatively. Yup, that's plain old air, all right... He tries to run in the air, his legs windmilling, his arms outstretched, but gets nowhere. Then he plummets.

The fall is long.

Jones has plenty of time to anticipate the impact.

When it happens, it knocks him senseless for a while. When he comes to, he realizes he's still alive, lying at the bottom of a Jones-shaped hole. So, there is no escape from humiliation and failure here, even in death...

Jones climbs wearily out. The inviting river lies a few feet away. He walks to it for a drink. Bending down, he cups his hand and scoops up some water.

A grinning shark zips out and swallows Jones' head and neck. Jones stands up, bearing the shark aloft like a hat, its tail flapping. He gropes around until his hand lands on a petrified stick. With the stick, he begins belaboring the shark with meaty thumps, until it finally releases him and flops back indignantly into the river.

"Yipe-yipe-yipe-yipe!"

This incident has convinced Jones that he must get back to his own universe. His despair has been replaced by renewed ambition. But the portal-locus is far above. He cranes his neck backwards, examining the vertiginous wall. There is nothing for it but to climb.

Jones, utilizing cracks and crevices, begins the ascent.

Such a climb should be impossible. But it is not. It takes nearly half an hour, though.

As he lays his first hand over the rim, he hears a cracking and crumbling. He realizes with a sinking feeling that this portion of the rim is giving way. A mass of rock detaches, carrying Jones back down with it.

Jones lands first. This time he unexplainably does not make a hole. A shadow grows around him. Jones removes his Emergency Umbrella from his belt and opens it over his head. The giant boulder lands on him.

He emerges from beneath it, flat as a pancake, hairy on top, with feet protruding on the bottom. With a *SPROING* he accordions out, resuming his normal shape.

Wearily, he makes the climb again.

This time he gains the surface of the mesa successfully.

It is almost pickup time.

Jones rushes back to the markers.

He has only one minute to spare. He wishes he could somehow recover the others, but there is no sign of their whereabouts, and no time to search. A better-equipped force can return for them later. Jones stands hopefully between the poles.

Idly, impulsively, using the tip of his boot, Jones draws two parallel lines in the thin dirt, then connects them with crossbars.

The sketch immediately becomes twin gleaming iron rails lying on tarry sleepers. An enormous express train materializes a few yards away, travelling one hundred miles an hour straight for Jones. The impossible creature is driving it. Before Jones can move, he finds himself riding the cowcatcher across the mesa. When the train reaches the edge, it continues onward across a heretofore-nonexistent bridge.

Jones' wails doppler off into the distance.

Back at mission control, nerves are tightened to the breaking point. A large clock sweeps out the seconds till retrieval with a thin red hand. Carr wishes there was some switch, however symbolic, which he could throw, so he'd feel as if he were instrumental in bringing the team home. But the whole return process, like the dispatch, is under the control of the machines.

Carr checks his watch, then the clock, then his watch again. The other members of Mission Control stand at their duty stations. watching their readouts, alert for any significant fluctuations in the fabric of the dimensions. The assembled members of the intelligence community exchange glances only they can interpret.

The whine of the generator is rising, rising--

Zero hour arrives.

No one is breathing.

The generators unleash their snap, like the cracking of some hunter-god's whip.

No explorers reappear. The stage is empty.

Initially, everyone is stunned by the failure of the explorers to return. There is absolute silence for a time. Then, two things happen simultaneously.

Carr notes that although the generator has been automatically shut down, the connection between dimensions remains open. At the far end of the cornucopia is a tiny circle, bright with sun and sand and a small crazy Herriman moon.

At the same time, the technicians begin nervously calling out their reports.

"Planck's Constant dropping!"

"Boltzmann's Constant increasing--up to one point three eight zero four two--"

"Avogadro's Constant falling. Down by point zero zero zero zero zero zero three!"

A phone rings; someone answers. She listens, then drops the receiver, white-faced.

"That was Cerro Tololo Observatory. Hubble's Constant is changing!"

A hot wind blows out of the ring, smiting Carr. He grows dizzy, puts a hand to his head. It seems he can see the distant single headlight of a train approaching out of the tiny circle, hear its mad whistle. A set of railroad tracks suddenly snaps into being, leading out of the concentric rings of the annulus, across the floor, where they sever cables and pipes, and through the wall of the soundstage, which has opened in a train-shaped hole.

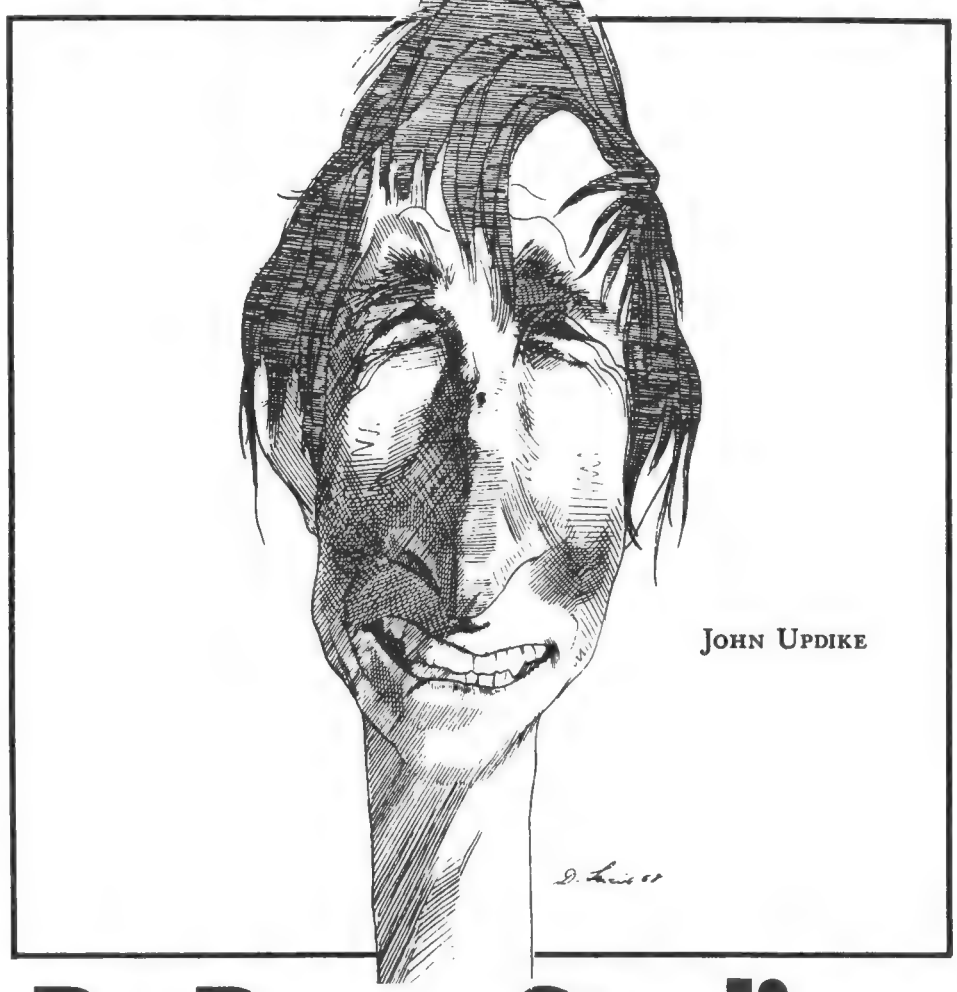
Carr feels at last that he has to speak, all the enormous responsibility devolving on him. Everyone's shocked faces are imploring him. But what to say? What words can possibly sum up the utter finality of the disastrous mission?

At last it comes to him, the phrase tripping over his unwieldy tongue:

"Tha-tha-that's all, folks!" ●

Nebula nominee Paul Di Filippo is a regular contributor to EYE, whenever we can pry him away from his TV on Saturday mornings, that is.

CATSCAN



JOHN UPDIKE

By Bruce Sterling

UPDIKE'S VERSION

John Updike has got to be the epitome of everything that SF readers love to hate. Those slim, clever, etiolated mainstream novels about well–to–do *New Yorker* subscribers, who sip white wine and contemplate adultery . . . Novels stuffed like Christmas geese with hi–falutin' literary values . . . Mention Updike at a SFWA gig, and you get yawns, shudders, shakings of the head . . . His work affects science fiction writers like cayenne pepper affects a pack of bloodhounds.

Why? Because John Updike has everything SF writers don't. He is, in some very real sense, everything SF writers aren't.

Certain qualities exist, that novelists are popularly supposed to possess. Gifts, abilities, that win An Author respect, that cause folks to back off and gape just a bit if they find one in a grocery line. Qualities like: insight into modern culture. A broad sympathy for the manifold quirks of human nature. A sharp eye for the defining detail. A quick ear for language. A mastery of prose.

John Updike possesses these things. He is erudite. He has, for instance, actually read Isak Dinesen, Wallace Stevens, Celine, Jean Rhys, Günter Grass, Nabokov and Bellow. Not only has he read these obscure and intimidating people, but he has publicly discussed the experience with every sign of genuine enjoyment.

Updike is also enormously clever, clever to a point that approaches genius through the sheer irrepressible business of its dexterity. Updike's paragraphs are so brittle, so neatly nested in their comma'ed clauses, that they seem to burst under the impact of the reader's gaze, like hyper–flaky croissants.

Updike sees how things look, notices how people dress, hears how people talk. His eye for the telling detail can make even golf and bird–watching, the ultimate yawnable white–bread Anglo pastimes, more or less interesting. (Okay––not *very* interesting, granted. But interesting for the sheer grace of Updike's narrative technique. Like watching Fred Astaire take out the garbage.)

It would be enlightening to compare John Updike to some paragon of science fiction writing. Unfortunately no such paladin offers himself, so we'll have to make do with a composite.

What qualities make a great science fiction writer? Let's look at it objectively, putting aside all that comfortable bullshit about the virtues authors are supposed to have. Let's look at the science fiction writer as he is.

Modern culture, for instance. Our SF paladin is not even sure it exists, except as a vaguely oppressive force he's evaded since childhood. He lives in his own one–man splinter culture, and has ever since that crucial time in childhood––when he was sick in bed for two years, or was held captive in the Japanese prison camp, or lived in the Comoros Islands with monstrous parents who were nuts on anthropology or astronomy or Trotsky or religion.

He's pretty much okay now, though, our science fiction author. He can feed himself and sign checks, and he makes occasional supply trips into the cultural anchorage of SF fandom, where he refreshes his soul by looking at people far worse off than he is. But he dresses funny, and mumbles to himself in the grocery line.

While standing there, he doesn't listen to the other folks and make surreptitious authorly notes about dialogue. Far from it: he's too full of unholy fire to pay much attention to mere human beings. And anyway, his characters generally talk about stuff like neutrinos or Taoism.

His eyes are glazed, cut off at the optic nerve while he watches brain–movies. Too many nights in too many cheap con hotels have blunted his sense of aesthetics; his characters live in geodomes or efficiencies or yurts. They wear one–piece jumpsuits because jumpsuits make people one monotonous color from throat to foot, which allows our attention to return to the neutrinos––of which, incidentally, ninety percent of the universe consists, so that the entire visible world of matter is a mere *froth*, if we only knew.

But he's learned his craft, our science fiction paladin. The *real* nutcases don't have enough mental horsepower to go where he's gone. He works hard and he thinks hard and he knows what he's doing. He's read Kuttner and Kornbluth and Blish and Knight, and he knows how to Develop an Idea entertainingly and rigorously, and how to keep pages turning meanwhile, and by Christ those are no easy things. So there, Mr. John Updike with your highflown talk of aht and beautieh. That may be okay for you Ivy League pinky–lifters with your sissy bemoaning about the Crisis of Culture . . . As if there was going to *be* a culture after the millennial advent of (Biotech)(Cybernetics)(Space Travel)(Robots)(Atomic Energy)(General Semantics)(Dean Drive)(Dianetics) . . .

So––there's the difference. It exists, for better or worse. None of this is lost on John Updike. He knows about science fiction, not a hell of a lot, but probably vastly more than most science fiction writers know about John Updike. He recognizes that it requires specialized expertise to write good SF, and that there are vast rustling crowds of us on the other side of the cultural spacewarp, writing for Ace Books and *Amazing Stories*. Updike reads Vonnegut and Le Guin and Calvino and Lem and Wells and Borges, and would probably read anybody else whose prose didn't cause him physical pain. And from this reading, he knows that the world–view is different in SFville . . . that writers think literature, and that SF writers think SF.

And he knows, too, that it's not T.S. Eliot's world any more, if indeed it ever was T.S. Eliot's world. He knows we live in a world that loves to think SF, and has thought SF ever since Hiroshima, which was the *ne plus ultra* of Millennial Technological Advents, which really and truly did change the world forever.

So Updike has rolled up his pinstriped sleeves and bent his formidable intelligence in our direction, and lo we have a science fiction novel, *Roger's Version* by John Updike.

Of course it's not *called* a science fiction novel. Updike has seen Le Guin and Lem and Vonnegut crawl through the spacewarp into his world. He's seen them wriggle out, somehow, barely, gasping and stinking of rocket fuel. Updike has no reason to place himself in a position they went to great pains to escape. But *Roger's Version* does feature a computer on its cover, if not a rocketship or a babe in a bubble helmet, and by heaven it is a science fiction novel––and a very good one.

Roger's Version is Updike's version of what SF should be on about. It deals with SF's native conceptual underpinnings: the impact of technology on society. The book is

about technolatry, about millennial visionary thinking. This is SF–think as examined by a classic devotee of lit–think.

It's all there, quite upfront and nakedly science fictional. It puzzles mainstream commentators. "It's as though Updike had challenged himself to convert into the flow of his novel the most resistant stuff he could think of," marvels the *Christian Science Monitor*, alarmed to find a Real Novel that actually deals straightforwardly with real ideas. "The aggressiveness of Updike's imagination is often a marvel," says *People*, a mag whose utter lack of imagination is probably its premier selling point.

And look at this list of author's credits: Fred Hoyle, Martin Gardner, Gerald Feinberg, Robert Jastrow. Don't tell me Updike's taken the *science* seriously. But he has––he's not the man to deny the devil his due, especially after writing *Witches of Eastwick*, which would have been called a fantasy novel if it had been written badly by a nobody.

But enough of this high–flown abstraction––let's get to grips with the book. There's these two guys, see. There's Roger Lambert, a middle–aged professor of theology, a white–wine–sipping adultery–contemplating intellectual New Englander who probably isn't eighty light–years removed from John Updike. Roger's a nasty piece of business, mostly, lecherous, dishonest and petty–minded, and obsessed with a kind of free–floating Hawthornian Protestant guilt that has been passed down for twenty generations up Boston way, and hasn't gotten a bit more specific in the meantime.

And then there's Roger Lambert's antagonist, Dale Kohler. Dale's a young computer hacker with pimples and an obnoxious cocksure attitude. If Dale were just a little more hip about it, he'd be a cyberpunk, but for thematic reasons Updike chose to make Dale a born–again Christian. We never really believe this, though, because Dale almost never talks Jesus. He talks AND–OR circuits, and megabytes, and Mandelbrot sets, with all the techspeak fluency Updike can manage, which is considerable. Dale talks God on a microchip, technological transcendence, and he was last seen in Greg Bear's *Blood Music* where his name was different but his motive and character were identical. Dale is a type. Not just a science fictional type, but the type that *creates* science fiction, who talks God for the same reason Philip K. Dick talked God. Because it comes with the territory.

Oh yeah, and then we've got some women. They don't amount to much. They're not people, exactly. They're temptresses and symbols.

There's Roger Lambert's wife, Esther, for instance. Esther ends up teaching Dale Kohler the nature of sin, which utterly destroys Dale's annoying moral certitude, and high time, too. Esther does this by the simple expedient of adulterously fucking Dale's brains out, repeatedly and in meticulously related detail, until Dale collapses from sheer weight of original sin.

A good trick. But Esther breezes through this inferno of deviate carnality, none the worse for the experience; invigorated, if anything. Updike tells us an old tale in this: that women *are* sexuality, vast unplumbed cisterns of it, creatures of mystery, vamps of the carnal abyss. I just can't bring myself to go for this notion, even if the Bible tells me so. I *know* that women don't believe this stuff.

Then there's Roger Lambert's niece, Verna. I suspect she represents the Future, or at least the future of America. Verna's a sad case. She lives on welfare with her illegitimate mulatto kid, a little girl who is Futurity even more incarnate. Verna listens to pop music, brain–damaging volumes of it. She's cruel and stupid, and as corrupt as her limited sophistication allows. She's careless of herself and others, exults in her degradation, whores sometimes when she needs the cocaine money. During the book's crisis, she breaks her kid's leg in a reckless fit of temper.

A woman reading this portrayal would be naturally enraged, reacting under the assumption that Updike intends us to believe in Verna as an actual human being. But Verna, being a woman, isn't. Verna is America, instead: dreadfully hurt and spiritually degraded, cheapened, teasing, but full of vitality, and not without some slim hope of redemption, if she works hard and does what's best for her (as defined by Roger Lambert). Also, Verna possesses the magic of fertility, and nourishes the future, the little girl Paula. Paula, interestingly, is every single thing that Roger Lambert isn't, i.e. young, innocent, trusting, beautiful, charming, lively, female and not white.

Roger sleeps with Verna. We've seen it coming for some time. It is, of course, an act of adultery and incest, compounded by Roger's complicity in child abuse, quite a foul thing really, and narrated with a certain gloating precision that fills one with real unease. But it's Updike's symbolic gesture of cultural rapprochement. "It's helped get me ready for death," Roger tells Verna afterward. Then: "Promise me you won't sleep with Dale." And Verna laughs at the idea, and tells him: "Dale's a non–turnon. He's not even evil, like you." And gives Roger the kiss of peace.

So, Roger wins, sort of. He is, of course, aging rapidly, and he knows his cultural values don't cut it any more, that maybe they never cut it, and in any case he is a civilized anachronism surrounded by a popcultural conspiracy of vile and rising noise. But at least *Dale* doesn't win. Dale, who lacks moral complexity and a proper grasp of the true morbidity of the human condition, thinks God can be found in a computer, and is properly nemesized for his hubris. The future may be fucked, but at least Dale won't be doing it.

So it goes, in *Roger's Version*. It's a good book, a disturbing book. It makes you think. And it's got an edge on it, a certain grimness and virulence of tone that some idiot would probably call "cyberpunk" if Updike were not writing about the midlife crisis of a theology professor.

Roger's Version is one long debate, between Updike's Protestantism and the techno–zeitgeist of the '80s. With great skill, Updike parallels the arcanity of cyberdom and the equally arcane roots of Christian theology. It's good; it's clever and funny; it verges on the profound. The far reaches of modern computer science––chaos theory, fractals, simulationism, statistical physics and so on––are indeed theological in their implications. Some of their spokesmen have a certain evangelical righteousness of tone that could only alarm a cultural arbiter like John Updike. There are indeed heretic gospels inside that machine, just like there were gospels in a tab of LSD, only more so. And it's a legitimate writerly task to inquire about those gospels and wonder if they're any better than the old one.

So John Updike has listened, listened very carefully and learned a great deal, which he parades deftly for his readership, in neatly tended flashes of hard–science exposition. And he says: I've heard it before, and I may not exactly believe in that Old Rugged Cross, but I'm damned if I'll believe these crazy hacker twerps with their jogging shoes.

There's a lot to learn from this book. It deals with the entirety of our zeitgeist with a broad–scale vision that we SF types too often fail to achieve. It's an interesting debate, though not exactly fair: it's muddied with hatred and smoldering jealousy, and a very real resentment, and a kind of self–loathing that's painful to watch.

And it's a cheat, because Dale's "science" has no real intellectual validity. When you strip away the layers of Updike's cyber–jargon, Dale's efforts are only numerology, the rankest kind of dumb superstition. "Science" it's not. It's not even good theology. It's heretic voodoo, and its pre–arranged failure within this book proves nothing about anything.

Updike is wrong. He clings to a rotting cultural fabric that he knows is based on falsehoods, and rejects challenges to that fabric by declaring "well you're another." But science, true science, does learn from mistakes; theologians like Roger Lambert merely further complicate their own mistaken premises.

I remain unconvinced, though not unmoved, by Updike's object lesson. His book has hit hard at my own thinking, which, like that of most SF writers, is overly enamored of the millennial and transcendant. I know that the twentieth century's efforts to kick Updike's Judaeo–Christian WestCiv values have been grim: Stalin's industrial terror, Cambodia's sickening Luddite madness, the convulsions today in Islam . . . it was all "Year Zero" stuff, attempts to sweep the board clean, that merely swept away human sanity, instead. Nor do I claim that the squalid consumerism of today's "secular–Humanist" welfare states is a proper vision for society.

But I can't endure the sheer snobbish falseness of Updike's New England Protestantism. Never mind that it's the legacy of American letters, that it's the grand tradition of Hawthorne and Melville, that it's what made America great. It's a shuck, ladies and gentlemen. It won't wash. It doesn't own the future; it won't even kiss the future goodbye on its way to the graveyard. It doesn't own our minds any more.

We don't live in an age of answers, but an age of ferment. And today that ferment is reflected faithfully in a literature called science fiction.

SF may be crazy, it may be dangerous, it may be shallow and cocksure, and it should learn better. But in some very real way it is truer to itself, truer to the world, than is the writing of John Updike.

This is what has drawn Updike, almost despite himself, into science fiction's cultural territory. For SF writers, his novel is a lesson and a challenge. A lesson that must be learned and a challenge that must be met.

LETTERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

details all the more interesting), and the ongoing posthumous publication of new previously-unpublished material. Ted's description erroneously implies a vacuum at the core of PKDS which simply does not exist.

I sympathize with Ted's outrage. Phil's internally inconsistent memory of events (as recounted in numerous interviews now seeing publication or republication) is quite possibly unfair to a number of people, Ted White not the least. Nevertheless, I think it is unwarranted of him to strike back with a deliberate misrepresentation which maligns a thousand people around the world for their interest in the lasting literature of Philip K. Dick and the life of the man who produced it.

It is unfortunate, but true, that PKD had several corrosive aspects of his personality. As a longtime friend, editor and collaborator with Dick, Ted White has been exposed to more of these aspects than most. As such, we think he can be forgiven moments of rhetorical excess—after all, Ted's opinion of Dick's work remains as high as anyone in the PKDS.

Whenever we plan on running anything as lengthy and as multi-parted as our PKD section in EYE #2, we actively seek out opposing viewpoints for balance. This gets us into trouble, but seems only fair.

Those interested in the PKD Society and its Newsletter can write to:

PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, Ca, 95442
$6.00/four issues, incl. membership

RICHARD DORSETT
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. . . The Phil Dick section was right-on; Ted White's piece has the ring of truth. Which doesn't detract from the quality of Dick's best work. In fact, it makes you appreciate it more: he probably couldn't have written some of that stuff if he hadn't been a drug-crazed loon.

Richard Dorsett, meet Andy Watson, and vice versa. One man's vituperation is another man's praise.

LEWIS SHINER
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Now, as they say, we're getting somewhere. SF EYE #1 was a valuable document in its complete dissection of the c*b*rp*nk movement—if nothing else, it's the easiest way yet to explain the entire phenomenon to somebody from, say, Mars. But we knew you could do that. Issue #2 shows the range of the magazine is capable of, and points out some pretty exciting new directions.

The Shepard interview was quite effective. Not only did it cover a lot of historical ground, it did a good job of capturing Lucius' personality and verbal style. The Dick section was interesting, if not revolutionary. The Sterling column was at least witty and entertaining, despite the fact that Lem's work doesn't bear out Bruce's assertations. The essays that launched Bruce into such ecstacies left me addled and more than a little pissed off—but I've debated Bruce on this issue at length elsewhere.

By far the best thing in the magazine was Shirley's column on Stelarc. This is no mere rhetorical attack on outdated writers; here is a positive vision of what SF could and should be. The piece is laced with ideas the way electric Kool-Aid was laced with LSD. By the end of it Shirley had wrought the greatest miracle of all—reminded me of why I used to like to read SF in the first place.

The cover was gorgeous. Even the letter columns were stimulating. I read the entire issue overnight. Clearly the magazine is homing in on its true direction. Give us more!

Aw c'mon Lew, where's that famous critical needle of yours? What does it take to piss you off (besides reprinting Lem essays)? Maybe this issue, as it contains (eyes dart from side to side, the voice drops to a hoarse whisper) fiction, *proving that EYE will go to any lengths to generate contentious letters.*

RICHARD KADREY
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I think it's called "mega-stomp journalism." The Shepard interview is an example. It's where you answer readers' questions so thoroughly, so obsessively, so goddamned loudly that they feel they've been rolled and tattooed and left for dead under the burned-out hulk of a '56 Chevy in a bowling alley parking lot somewhere in east LA under a full moon. I still don't know Shepard's shoe size or his favorite color, but I'm sure you'll correct those oversights in your next issue. My only remaining question is "What next?" You've pretty much torched the "C" word and Shepard; is the world ready for a twenty thousand word interview with Jerry Pournelle's dog?

My only complaint about the issue was the Philip Dick material. All of it was interesting, but I can't read things like the outline for his unwritten novel without becoming aware of a subtle stink of decay. The obsessive attention paid to Dick since his death makes me very uncomfortable. Yeah, the guy's a tragic figure; yeah, he wrote some great stuff; and yeah, it's a bitch he died just when he might have made some big money and gotten the recognition he deserved, but the amount of Dick minutiae that's been turning up in print these last few years has the look of some incipient cult. Can't we read and respect his work without deifying him? It's this insistence on portraying Dick as some larger than life demi-god jacked into the cosmic array that makes me queasy, as if by deifying him, the Dickophiles can ride his coattails into enlightenment. It also smacks of whiny hippie nostalgia, of deliberately manufacturing a Pop god so the minions can dangle him in other people's faces to show that they're one of the chosen few who *really* understands. I mean we've already got Scientology and those Darkover cretins, do we really need another sci-fi church?

Shirley's Stelarc piece was a killer. (Actually I'd heard of Stelarc back in LA when some friends of mine into S&M showed me a book of his suspension events, claiming they knew people who were into weirder stuff. They wondered about the possibility of getting a NEA grant.)

These are hot times to be alive, as SF and the real burrito and TV world move closer together. I wholeheartedly recommend a video entitled *Rendezvous Houston*. It's a recording of Jean Michael Jarre's show for Houston's 150th anniversary. They used the skyline of the city as a screen for projections—actually beamed the images the full length of those enormous skyscrapers, swept the sky with argon lasers as fireworks were going off, all while Jarre played live musical accompaniment. Cinema vertigo. Video as the drug of choice. Prepare to be staggered.

I am less-than-reliably informed that A, Shepard has never worn shoes, and that B, his favorite color is not in the visible spectrum, and has no name. These are the reasons for the two serious omissions from our interview that seemed to have troubled you. Now *you complain about our forthcoming interview with Pournelle's dog. I've been transcribing for a month, and it has not been easy. Oh, I speak Dog, but* Jerry's *dog only speaks Pentagonese.*

PAUL DI FILIPPO
2 Poplar Street
Providence, RI 02906

I won't say that issue #2 is a quantum leap from #1, for two reasons: First, I thought #1 was excellent; second, I'm sick of the phrase "quantum leap." However, I will say that #2 had even more of everything I liked in #1. "Meaty, Beaty, Big & Bouncy."

The letters revealed your audience is intelligent, hip and easily provoked. Not a bad mix of qualities.

"Eyeditorials" must be the hardest neologism in the world to pronounce. But the caliber of the short essays you and Steve produce more than compensates for the mental strain of the title.

The Shepard interview was awesome in its depth and serendipitous probing. A much-needed blast of insight into one or our more valuable writers. Enjoyed Thompson's Steadmanlike illo.

Good thing Rudy never came into proximity with Jerry F. himself. One suspects they would have been sucked together in a cosmic matter/antimatter explosion, kinda like how Superman in the 60's was always melding with some evil counterpart.

The "Dick fragment" I found of lesser caliber than his published work. Too tantalizing. One can only imagine in frustration what the real work would have been like.

Bruce's piece was a splendid extolling of a neglected genius. Bruce's selection of *A Perfect Vacuum* and *Imaginary Magnitudes* tallies exactly with my perception of Lem's best work. My quotation of Lem in my story "Conspiracy of Noise" was my own attempt to offer homage. I doubt, however, that the SF community at large will be swayed.

I would like to add two afterthoughts to my own piece ["The Ten Greatest SF Novels" in the "Eyetracks" section of EYE #2]:

1) The fact that my list might almost have been produced by some mainstream critic selecting the ten best novels (post-1950) of Western lit proves that SF no longer has to try to conquer the mainstream. We've done it! SF now represents the best that fiction has to offer.

2) *The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass is number 10.5. Sorta slipped my mind.

"Eyeditorial" was intended to be read, not pronounced; that is, absorbed as a single information unit. If you're reading it, I can only assume that you're reading it to somebody. Thus, you owe us another three bucks.

GREGORY BENFORD
1105 Skyline Drive
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

SF EYE #2 was tantalizing, and I hope you can fulfill the promise these initial issues have brought. A very handsome production indeed.

Bruce Sterling's piece on Lem raises an important issue: how desiccated can SF get before it becomes speculative essays or, worse, mannerist litbiz insider jokes? Lem's answer seems to me to be the cul-de-sac of a mind driven away from the human impulses in fiction. But Shakespeare surely showed us that a lot of deep content can accompany stories fraught with human meaning, and I'd rather follow his example than Lem's.

There's also a side point: much of Lem's thought about machine intelligence and SETI is either far out of date or else based on unspoken prejudices. This isn't high-mindedness, it's just ignorance. So far, despite much talk about AI, Lem has not rendered a vision of what it would be like that equals the best work done in the West.

Incidentally, Lem isn't a great seller in the US. Both his hardcover and paperback editors told me that he sells okay to libraries, and that's about it; he is kept afloat by those full page reviews in the *NY Times Refuse of Books*.

Steve, a remark on your review of my *Great Sky River*. I can't comment on whether my invented language therein resembles the work of Walter Jon Williams, since regrettably I've not had the time to read the man. But making new words by connecting two English words *can* be more than "an irritating stylistic tic," as you put it. It evokes an entirely different language, serving the same general purpose as did other features: for example, you'll find from the dialogue that the words "of" and "to" don't exist, and so have no parallel forms. In this other language you get words like "mainmind" and "ceramoshank" which are obviously technical, and "groundstriding" and "slamshut" that come from a nomad culture, and still further, a host of words beginning in "mech-" because there's an entire overculture which makes "mechmess" and spawns "micromechs," etc. This method seems to me to be greatly different from failure of "authorial precision," and in fact goes back to Joyce and Faulkner.

You've got a good point, and it is apparent that you were very careful about the language that you used in that book. I called the portmanteau word-creation the "Walter Jon Williams effect," not because he did it first, but because he is simply more blatant about it lately. I have viewed this kind of word-creation as a lack of imagination for decades. Pushing two words together to make one is something that SF and fantasy has been doing from the beginning. It is a personal irritant, and virtually always reflects a lack of precision in language. I am quite willing to believe that you were carefully calculating in your use of the portmanteau, especially considering the precision and care you took with the rest of the novel.

It is often hard to tell if someone is doing something dumb because they're lazy, or because they're using up a lot of brain cells carefully creating an effect that ends up with the same result. A portmanteau word simply makes my teeth grate. But I believe that your intent as stated was accurate, and I apologize for critical laziness on my part. I didn't bother to try to think through why you did this.

GREGORY BENFORD responds:

I understand you don't like portmanteau words, but it is important in writing criticisms to separate personal quirks from legitimate general demands. (I'm sure you don't really dislike such words, or you'd be howling over "smog" as a combination of "smoke" and "fog.") And you would have to argue that evolution of language this way is a bad procedure to allow into literature, since that's a principal mechanism for getting fresh words. Further, you must then explain why portmanteau words are wrong in SF, but are somehow okay in the works of Joyce, Nabokov, Faulkner, etc., all of whom devised new words.

Maintaining that the author simply hasn't found the more precise word asks its own question: *is* there another word? Sure, you could say "machine civilization waste," but "mechmess" is far superior as *language*.

I have always assumed that anything *a critic writes is a personal prejudice, by definition. We all have personal quirks. My distaste (perhaps irrational) for the portmanteau was developed over years of encountering it done badly ("bloodbile" "horselizard" "beefplant" etc.) in which the authors were indulging in a quick shortcut to put across a different concept. There are no absolute rules, including my own. You did handle portmanteau better than I've ever seen it, for the most part. Your "mech-" words were accurate. But a few others grated. Yes, reader, this is a personal dislike. I am willing to admit that a consummate chef could cook spinach in such a manner that it would be palatable to me. Yet, it is still spinach. However, there are many who love spinach. How about it, are there any others out there with opinions on this point? Preferably those who have read* Great Sky River.

We encourage our readers to write to us at our NEW address:

SCIENCE FICTION EYE
P.O. Box 43244
Washington, DC 20010-9244

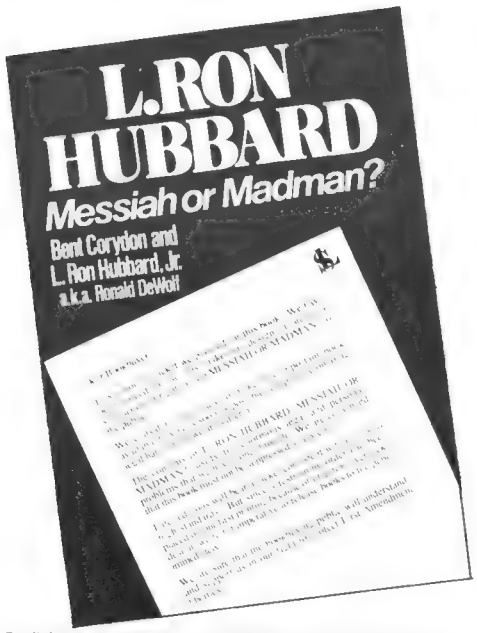
IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING THE VARIOUS RESPONSES TO THE *RESPONSE*:

Before we printed Rob Hardin's *Response to the Humanist Manifesto* (by John Kessel—EYE #1), we sent a copy to Mr. Kessel to which he responded. When it came to paste-up time, we realized Mr. Kessel's reply would use up all the book review space. So, regretfully, we bumped it. Lucius Shepard then sent us a funny piece entitled *Gag-Reflex at the Response to the Humanist Manifesto*. But, we still had no room for this material in #3.

So we have created an insert: a separate pamphlet containing the full text of Mr. Kessel's reply to Hardin, the Lucius Shepard article, two letters in support of Hardin (by strangers to us—not part of the argument), and—space permitting—a short poem by Greg Benford on the subject of manifestos in general.

All subscribers had an insert slipped into their copies. Those of you who bought this issue at a store will have to send us 50 cents and a return address.

EYETRACKS



L. RON HUBBARD: MESSIAH OR MADMAN?
by Bent Corydon and L. Ron Hubbard, Jr.
Lyle Stuart, July 1987, $20.00
ISBN 0-8184-04440-2

Reviewed by D. Cooper Vesco

'You're the greatest man since L. Ron Hubbard!' --Carl Shub, Jr. to Buffalo Bill Bittinger.

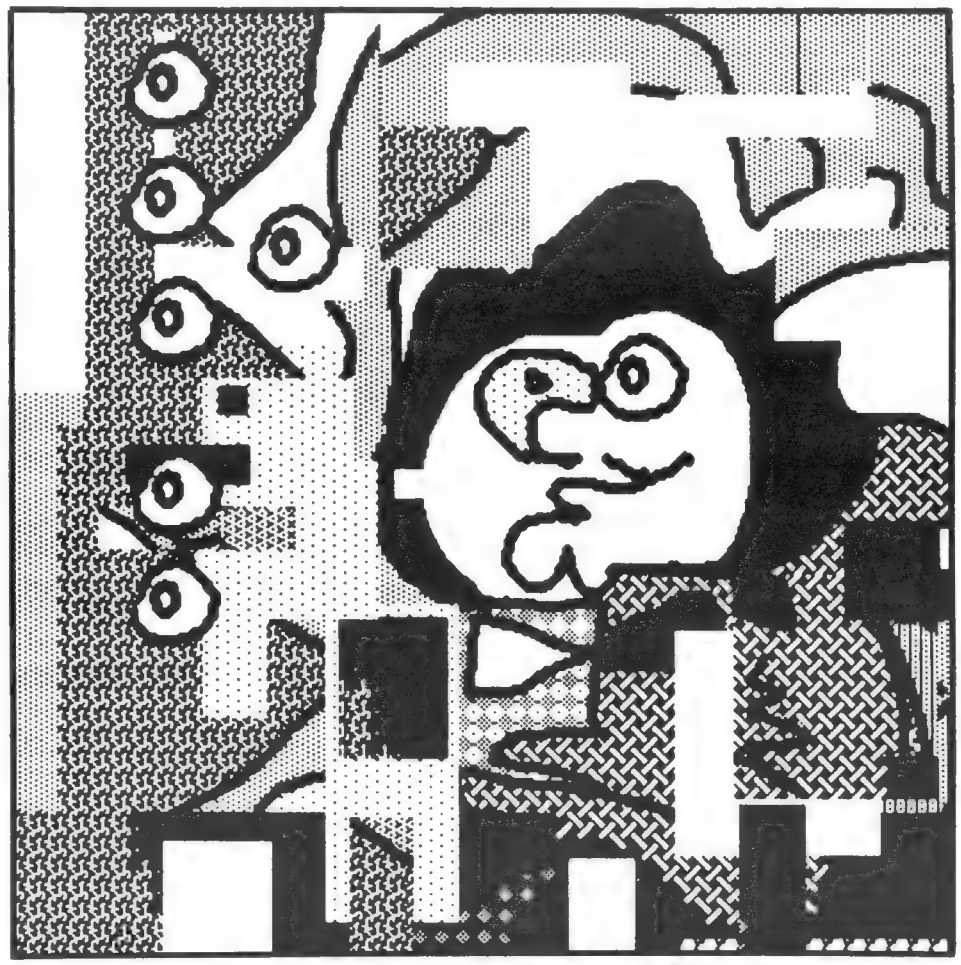
Time was when the best thing that could happen to a book in this country was to be banned in Boston. Yes, that enlightened metropolis maintained an official Board of Censors whose task it was to protect the public weal and morality from the corrupting influence of evil images and ideas as were advanced by wicked authors in depraved books.

Of course, any book that got that treatment in Boston (the Board of Censors hewed to a 100% Roman Catholic line as to what was permissible for the public to read) was guaranteed success all over this land. Including Boston.

Even though the Board of Censors is long gone, attempts to suppress books for various reasons have never ceased, and authors and publishers have never ceased to take secret delight in such attempts---on occasion, even to invent them---because they sell so damn many books.

An example: *The Secret Life of Walter Winchell*, by Lyle Stuart, published in 1953 by Boar's Head Books, contains the following odd statement as part of its front-matter:

> Epilogue in Advance
>
> A few days after this book was completed, a strange thing happened to its author.
>
> On the morning of August 11, 1953, the author, upon leaving his home in North Bergen, New Jersey, at 8:35 AM, was set upon by three men, who attempted to beat him into unconsciousness with a blackjack and with their fists.
>
> The beating was similar to two beatings given a New York radio commentator who had been consistently critical of Walter Winchell.
>
> It had this variation.
>
> The author fought off his attackers, secured the license number of their getaway car, and was able to make positive identification of two of the three men from rogues' gallery photographs. The auto license number belonged to one of the identified men.
>
> The two men were waterfront thugs. Both had long records of arrests and convictions for such crimes as brutal and atrocious as assault with intent to kill.
>
> At the time of the attack on the author, both men were out on bail ($40,000 each) in connection with a bomb-throwing incident.
>
> The two men were arrested. They have not yet revealed who, if anyone, put them up to the attack.
>
> The reader, like the author---who was given no clue to the origin or purpose of the attack---is left to seek an explanation.



Reviews & Opinions

The back cover of Stuart's book reproduces newspaper clippings about the attack on Stuart and police attempts to locate the missing third assailant. Golly, Walter Winchell doesn't want me to read this exposè of his corrupt person and wicked career. I gotta buy this book!

It's an old gimmick, and a very good one. Join the Rosicrucians, A.M.O.R.C., and learn the hidden wisdom of the ages. Subscribe to *Saucer News* and get all the facts that the Air Force doesn't want you to have. Come to the meeting at 8:30 PM, where our guest speaker will tell you what really happened to him---things that your newspaper refuses to print!

L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman? has a plain, generic looking cover with a letter from the publisher on it. It says, in part:

> Dear Bookbuyer:
>
> This is not the jacket we planned for this book. We have been forced to use this makeshift design in order to safeguard our right to ship *Messiah or Madman?* to the public.
>
> We consider it our duty to make this important book available to you as soon as possible---despite the ongoing legal harassment we are suffering.
>
> The contents of *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?* justify the enormous legal and personal problems that we have gone through. We are convinced that this book must not be suppressed at any cost!

Isn't that interesting? Doesn't it sound an awful lot like the stuff on Lyle Stuart's book about Walter Winchell? And, not to make too much of this, have you noticed that the publisher of *Messiah or Madman?* is none other than ---Lyle Stuart?

Isn't that astonishing?

And when you open *M or M*, one of the first things you hit is a preface that tells you all about the problems of publishing anything derogatory about L. Ron. We learn about the experiences of Omar Garrison, who in 1979 was commissioned by the Hubbard people to write an "official" biography of the Great Man. Garrison put in five years' work, decided that he couldn't write the kind of sanitized, glowing portrait that one expects in an "official" biography.

Consequently, "In early 1984, disgusted by the entire affair and realizing he could not prevail over the inevitable harassment and legal/financial obstacle course awaiting him, Garrison accepted a large cash sum from Hubbard's agents not to write the biography which he was then planning. This one would have given what was, in his own estimation, a truthful account of Hubbard's Life."

We then hear about Paulette Cooper who *did* write and publish *The Scandal of Scientology*, in the wake of which she began to suffer terrible events.

And next, the following: "Recently, after the Church discovered that the book you are reading was being written, a roughly six foot four inch, 250 lb. man in black leather jacket and gloves arrived at my workplace asking for me.

"Failing to locate me, he told one of my assistants, 'Since Corydon's not here, you'll do.' He then yelled, 'You are standing in the way of Ron's bridge!' and proceeded to punch him in the face and knock him around."

Shades of the *Epilogue in Advance* gang! Do you think that 250 lb. bruiser in the leather jacket could have been one of the waterfront thugs who attacked Lyle Stuart in 1953? Thirty-odd years had gone by, the fellow must be getting kind of long in the tooth, but . . .

Could it be?

See, I have a little problem with this long recitation of *Here are the secret truths they don't want you to learn*. I have a terrible feeling that Lyle Stuart is up to his old tricks. Maybe his Winchell book was a good and accurate exposè, or maybe it was a hatchet job, and I have heard from other sources that Winchell was pretty much of a sleazeball and not above hiring goons to lean on people he perceived as his enemies.

And I've heard the same kind of things about Hubbard.

But ain't it all just a little bit strange?

Anyway, we have here a peculiar hodge-podge of a book divided broadly into two sections, one by Bent Corydon, the other by L. Ron Hubbard, Jr. ("a.k.a. Ronald DeWolf").

Corydon identifies himself as a former bigshot in the Church of Scientology, former holder of a Scientology Mission, who fell out with the higher-ups in the organization, got booted out on his ass (and/or quit in high dudgeon), and decided to Go Public with the Whole Dirty Truth about Scientology.

What Corydon gives us is a kind of behind-the-scenes horror story, worthy of the goings-on in the White House at the height of the Nixon era, or maybe the internal fan squabbles between the Futurians and New Fandom in the late 1930s, as described by Sam Moskowitz in his immortal tome, *The Immortal Storm*.

People running around in a heightened state of excitement, waving documents in the air, shouting denunciations at one another, calling plenary meetings, demanding accounting of missing funds, engaging in arcane doctrinal disputes, issuing broadsides and generally having a heck of a good time.

That's the way it was in fandom in the long-ago era that Moskowitz describes, and it is only when you realize that these were the petty squabbles of a handful of high school kids meeting in somebody's Mom's basement on Saturday afternoons, does the delicious irony and absurdity of the whole thing hit you.

My friends, *Messiah or Madman?* is just like that.

We see L. Ron Hubbard, onetime hack sci-fi writer and World War Two navy vet, living out his own little fantasy. He's got his own fleet of ships cruising the Mediterranean. He gives himself whatever rank he feels like. (Captain? Commodore? Admiral?) He's surrounded by flocks of nubile little teenaged girls in short-skirted uniforms apparently copied from a 1943 Andrews Sisters movie.

And if anybody crosses the Commodore, he goes to the brig---uh, the Rehabilitation Project. People in the Rehab project are stuck in Hubbard's own little Gulag. They live in unventilated spaces between decks, get little to eat, roast of it's hot or shiver if it's cold, and when they're allowed back out they don't break the rules again!

For shorter-term but more dramatic punishment of infractions, we have the practice of "overboarding." *Id est*, the malefactor is literally thrown over the side, to swim, swarm, or scramble his or her way back onto the ship, a chilled and bedraggled but presumably wiser individual.

The whole thing sounds like a boys' game, a lot like *The Immortal Storm* and not to be taken seriously, until you realize that these are real people sailing around on real ships. Lives are involved, and people (according to Corydon) have been literally to suicide while involved in the Hubbard enterprise.

Wait a minute, is this just funny and silly? Or is it serious stuff?

You'll have to decide that for yourself.

Is Scientology a laughing matter?

According to Corydon, the cash flow involved is immense---something like $10,000,000 a month making its way to Scientology International. Since the missions operate like McDonalds franchises (this is Corydon's own image) with headquarters pulling a 10% rake-off, that means that the actual flow is a hundred mil a month, or 1.2 billion dollars a year! The total treasury of Scientology, according to Corydon, is on the order of 80 billion bucks!

This whole thing is overseen by a kind of internal money gestapo called (no joke) the Finance Police, commanded by (no joke) the

Finance Dictator.

Wow!

Of Course, to those of us who regard Hubbard primarily as a science fiction writer, the whole Dianetics/Scientology biz is an aberration. Over the thirty-odd years from the founding of Dianetics to the publication of *Battlefield Earth*, everybody I knew just figured that Hubbard had found himself a more lucrative racket than pounding his Remington.

When *Battlefield Earth* was published in 1981, it was backed by the biggest advertising and promotion campaign ever given to a science fiction book. Print pieces, radio commercials, billboards, posters and displays, you name it.

The book was a huge success, and even though it is a good, fast-paced space opera (such as one expected from an experienced pulpster), the degree of success that it attained was still surprising. Was it promoted *that* effectively?

Corydon gives us an insight into the success of *Battlefield Earth*. He writes about attending a meeting in San Francisco, where organization and finance in the Scientology empire have been discussed.

"After my return to the mission, I received constant calls for one thing or another, always accompanied by threats. One particular incident symbolized the ridiculousness of the situation: We were ordered to sell 1,000 copies of Hubbard's recently released science fiction book *Battlefield Earth* 'before Thursday' or I would be kicked out as a mission holder."

I live in a large metropolitan area, and I do most of my science fiction book buying in a big, general book store with a large science fiction section. Over a period of years I've become friends with the staff of this store, and a while ago I asked the manager how Hubbard's books—*Battlefield Earth* and his later science fiction series—have been doing.

"They do real well," he told me. "But the people who buy them aren't my regular science fiction customers. They're all Scientologists, and they keep coming back and buying more and more copies to give away."

Hmmm. Maybe they were receiving orders, too.

The part of *Messiah or Madman?* written by L. Ron, Jr., although it occupies the back section of the book, actually deals with events earlier in time than those covered by Corydon.

Junior gives us the background on L. Ron's various wives over the years, the relationships that he had with his children, and so on. There's a good deal, scattered between Corydon's and Junior's sections, on the early days of Di and Sci, with lengthy interpolations from those who were there, including science fiction fan Alva Rogers, and science fiction writers A.E. Van Vogt and R. Faraday Nelson. There's some fascinating background on the reactions of the science fiction community to the original announcement of Dianetics. This announcement took place in *Astounding Science Fiction* because no conventional scientific journal would run Hubbard's material. And there's a too-brief, fascinating section on the still earlier roots of Hubbardthink in the works of Aleister Crowley and Alfred Korzybski.

The late John W. Campbell, Jr.'s sponsorship of Dianetics is credited but is somewhat skimped. No mention is made of Campbell's own claim (in a letter to engineer and sometime sci-fi scrivener G. Harry Stine) that, "It was, as a matter of fact, I, not Ron, who originally suggested that it (Dianetics) should be dropped as a psychotherapy, and reconstituted as a religion."

And there are some wonderfully romantic images out of the official di/sci Mythos, stuff that pales *Oaspe*, the *Book of Mormon*, or the works of William Hope Hodgson in comparison. Notions of reincarnations and cosmic dramas stretching billions and even trillions of years. A wonderful slogan: "We've got a planet to take." following which achievement, fleets of spaceships bearing not the insignia of the United States or the Federated Earth or the League of Planets but of Scientology go out to span the galaxies and spread the enlightened word of the ascended master, L. Ron Hubbard.

There is a wonderful Trekkishness to this. L. Ron as Captain Kirk, assorted Scientology bigshots as Messrs. Spock and Sulu and Scotty and Bones, and a miniskirted nubile young Scientology messenger as Lt. Uhura . . . the mind boggles.

I keep wavering between two reactions to *Messiah or Madman*. Well, three, actually.

The first, just to get it out of the way, is this: from a technical or literary viewpoint, the book is just dreadful. The writing is bad, the organization is chaotic, there seems to have been no editor at all. Chronology is non-existent, it's 1950 on one page and 1983 on the next and 1966 on the next. The book desperately needs an index, and has none. There's no bibliography. There is a glossary, but it's a woefully inadequate one. There are lots of interpolations of sections by third parties—not Corydon or Junior—and it's often hard to tell who's talking.

But then we get past all those shortcomings and address the substance of the book, and—I really just don't know. If I shut my left eye and squint at it with the right one, it's lots of fun. Fun, fun, silly old little-boys-at-play fun, just like *The Immortal Storm*.

But if I shut my right eye and look at *Messiah or Madman?* with the left—it's really scary. Lots of big money, and serious mind-control stuff, and harassment and threats against "defectors," and, if Corydon is to be believed, yes, even deaths.

And what's scariest of all, after all he's seen and learned and lived through, you know, Corydon still believes in L. Ron and Scientology. It was those dirty underlings who led the Big Guy astray, and who are doing all this bad stuff now.

In his heart of hearts, like an apostate Catholic who thinks that the Pope somehow went wrong, but who still considers himself, in the most profound sense, a Good Catholic . . . Bent Corydon still considers himself, in the most profound sense, a Good Scientologist.

I guess, between the two, I really am scared.

D. Cooper Vesco is a former science fiction fan who prefers unworried sleep to threatening telephone calls.

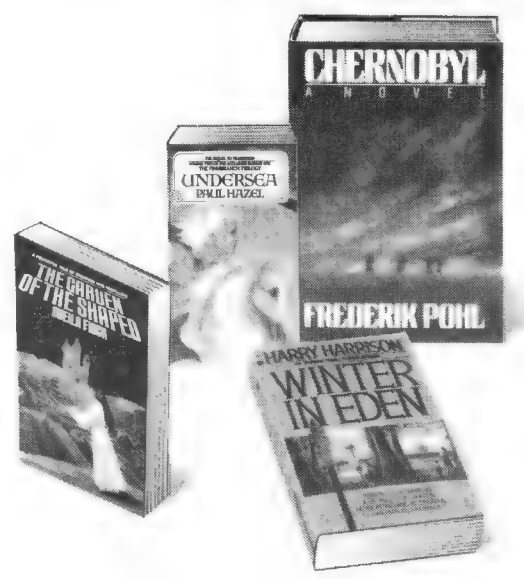
Welcome to our fall list

There's a lot to get excited about this season, with some major novels by long-time masters, big books by young writers deserving of notice, and plenty of great entertainment.

SEPTEMBER: If you've read **Harry Harrison's** breathtaking alternate prehistory ***West of Eden, Winter in Eden*** needs no introduction. This highly-acclaimed sequel is now available in paperback. ***Chernobyl* by Frederik Pohl** is one of the most important novels of the year, a stunning speculation on what it must have been like to be present during the most dangerous nuclear accident in our history. ***Undersea* by Paul Hazel** is the second novel in the brilliant high fantasy saga, the *Finnbranch Trilogy* (which began with ***Yearwood*** and concludes in December with ***Winterking***). And **Sheila Finch,** who has received raves for her first two novels, ***Infinity's Web*** and ***Triad,*** presents her third, a tale of struggle between races of gene-manipulated humans entitled ***The Garden of the Shaped.***

OCTOBER: The Rat is back. ***The Stainless Steel Rat Gets Drafted* by Harry Harrison** chronicles the further adventures of the infamous "Slippery Jim" diGriz. It's wonderful, non-stop fun. ***Dover Beach* by Richard Bowker** is a moving novel about America after a "limited" nuclear war and the search for a missing scientist. Bowker is a very gifted writer who has won praise for his recent novels, ***Replica*** and ***Marlborough Street.*** Speaking of gifted writers, **Pamela Sargent's** far-future novel ***The Shore of Women*** is quite an accomplishment. It was called "one of the great novels of science fiction" by *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* And ***Clypsis* by Jeffrey A. Carver** is the first novel in *Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway,* a hot new space opera series designed by one of the most imaginative minds in the business.

SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER

THE SECRET ASCENSION by Michael Bishop
Tor Books, November 1987, $16.95,
ISBN 0-312-93031-3

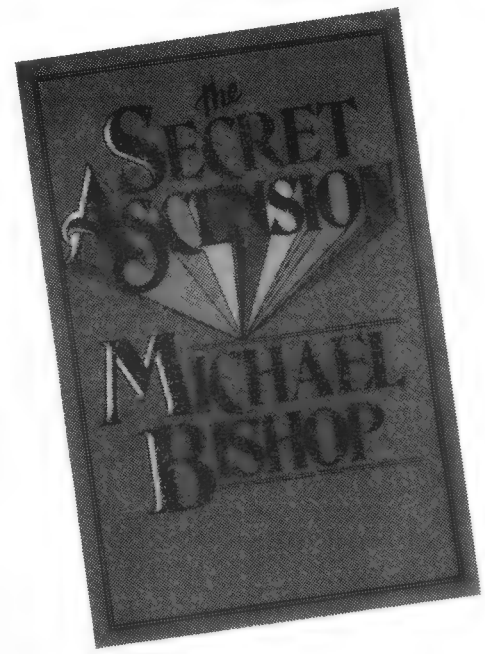
Reviewed by Richard Moore

Given the late Philip K. Dick's fascination with religion and alternate realities, it is not unexpected that writers would resurrect Dick as a character in SF novels and stories. Richard Lupoff led off with a novelette and now we have a novel by Michael Bishop. Bishop seemed an unlikely reanimator of Dick until I remembered that he, like Dick, has long been interested in religious themes. In *The Secret Ascension* Dick makes his first appearance in a resurrection "body" much as Jesus used between his own resurrection and ascension.

Aside from the resurrected Dick, Bishop's major character is a version of the everyman nonhero that populated many PKD novels. A clerk in the Happy Puppy Pet Emporium, Cal Pickford is terribly unhappy in a world where Richard Nixon is serving in his fourth term, everyone fears the federal agents known as "No Knocks," travel between states is forbidden, and everyone voicing dissent seems to disappear. It is also a world where Dick was successful as a mainstream novelist but dropped from sight when he began to write science fiction.

It is almost a disservice to the novel to read it as a mere homage to Dick. For although it is interesting at that level and there are many wonderful pieces of business guaranteed to amuse hard core Dick fans (and I am one), Bishop is least successful when he is most attempting to emulate PKD.

The most interesting character is Richard M. Nixon . . . an alternate world Nixon, unleashed by complete success in the early years of his presidency. Unlike Orson Scott Card, I didn't consider this gratuitous Nixon-bashing. For one thing, Nixon is a legitimate icon who has been turning up in fiction for years (Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* is a notable example). Bishop could no more have written this novel without



using Nixon than someone could write an alternate history of France in the early Nineteenth Century without using Napoleon, or Germany in the 1930's without using Hitler. The only criteria by which Bishop should be judged is whether or not he brings it off. He does, brilliantly. That the real Nixon of our world might not behave in such a fashion is irrelevant and a rather pointless, stupid thing to debate. Bishop's "Nixon" is a completely realized, believable character and that's all that matters.

Bishop has masterfully created a world wherein America won the war in Vietnam, neutralized the Russians through Detente, and crushed all domestic dissent. The detail is wonderful might-have-been stuff. General William Westmoreland became Nixon's Vice President on the 1976 ticket (when he crushed Jimmy Carter) and stayed on during the fourth victory in 1980 (over the token opposition of Ed Ashner). Joel Hinckley, Jr. (sic) is the latest to attempt to assassinate Nixon (others include Squeaky Fromme and a member of the Beach Boys). Freed of the cash drain of Vietnam, the space program is far advanced of the one we know, with a fully operational moon base and plans for a Mars mission in the 1980's.

This is grand stuff, wonderfully worked out in great detail.

Readers will have to wade through some rather slow early-going material wherein characters speak in Gernsbackian lectures. And some may have trouble imagining Philip K. Dick roaming West Georgia (I am a native Georgian and I had trouble). But it's worth the effort. This is a novel that will improve with each re-reading. It is far more than a tribute to Phil Dick and should find favor with even those readers who have never cared for Dick's own writings.

(Consumer note: This book was severely underprinted by its publisher. All copies have been snapped up, and its collector value is climbing. You may have to wait for the paperback. **spb** *)*

Richard Moore is a Washington, DC area mystery writer, and long-time admirer of Philip K. Dick.

YO, CHECK IT OUT

Dime Bag Reviews by John Shirley

The unadulterated absolute righteous fact of the matter is: the greatest science fiction novel of the last two decades is *The Book of the SubGenius* (Simon & Schuster). It's a work of riotous, hilarious, non-stop courageous inspiration by the Reverend Ivan Stang, Pope Philo Drummond, and other High, very High, Entities in the SubGenius Foundation. Stang's writing in particular is exceptionally brilliant. I soberly and sincerely rank him with Thomas Pynchon, Ballard, William Burroughs, and T.C. Boyle. And

NOVEMBER: ***The Universe*** **edited by Byron Preiss** is simply incredible. This tour of the galaxy and beyond includes award-caliber short fiction by the likes of Poul Anderson, Gregory Benford, David Brin, Robert Silverberg, Connie Willis and others, mind-stretching essays by some of the leading astronomers in the world, and over 40 gorgeous full-color illustrations and photographs. American Book Award winner **Lisa Goldstein,** who writes like a dream, will publish ***A Mask for the General,*** a near-future novel about power and responsibility. ***The Goldcamp Vampire*** is **Elizabeth Scarborough's** latest, a high-spirited fantasy with Alaskan gold, vampires, were-mooses and a young journalist up to her neck (you'll pardon the expression) in trouble. (We'll be reissuing Scarborough's ***The Harem of Aman Akbar*** in September and the omnibus ***Songs from the Seashell Archives, Volume One*** [which contains ***Song of Sorcery*** and ***The Unicorn Creed***] in October.) The totally outrageous *Wild Cards* series edited by **George R.R. Martin** is back with ***Jokers Wild***—the latest chapter in the secret history of our times. **Jonathan Wylie** begins a bold new fantasy trilogy, *Servants of Ark,* with ***The First Named.*** And we'll be reissuing **Ursula K. Le Guin's** unforgettable short story collection, ***The Compass Rose.***

DECEMBER: As good as the fall list is, the absolute highlight is **Gregory Benford's** new novel, ***Great Sky River.*** Suffice it to say that it's the best novel he's written yet—which is another way of saying it's one of the best hard sf novels ever. There's another terrific sf novel in December, ***After Long Silence*** **by Sheri Tepper.** It's a big, absorbing tale of alien contact that Anne McCaffrey called "magnificent." **Rose Estes** launches a powerful prehistoric fantasy trilogy this month, *Saga of the Lost Lands,* with ***Blood of the Tiger.*** And we'll reissue ***Star Rebel*** and ***Rebel's Quest,*** two novels in F.M. Busby's Hulzein Dynasty saga, in one big volume entitled ***The Rebel Dynasty, Volume One.***

We're quite proud of this list. And wait until you hear about what we have coming this winter. We think you'll be very pleased.

With warmest regards for the future,

Publisher, Bantam Spectra

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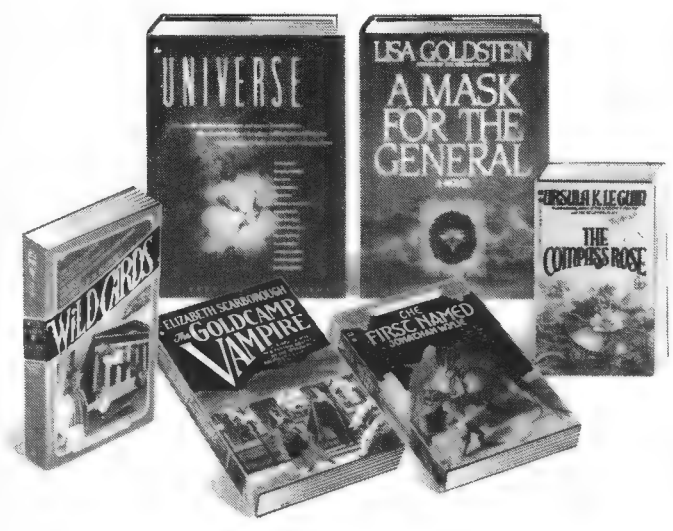
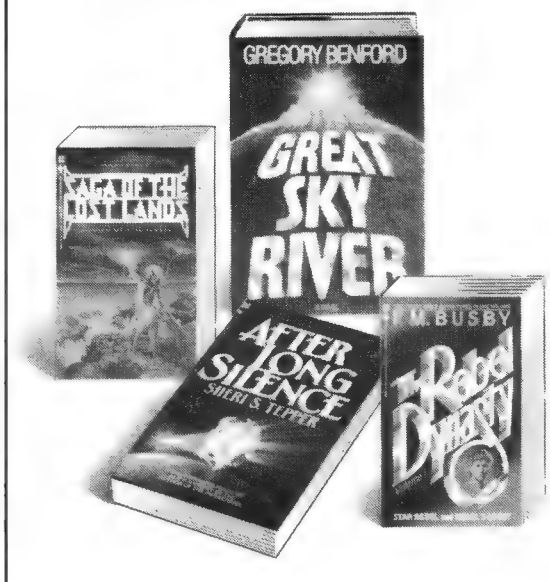
NOVEMBER



DECEMBER



the profuse artwork in this book—by Paul Mavrides, LIES, Robert Williams, and others—will take the top of your head off. The troubling fact is, *The Book of the SubGenius* is not exactly a novel, it's not a fiction—*it's the truth*. This book explains the Conspiracy, the Con that uses Technoboredom, television, Top 40, nine to five jobs, and other insidious devices to NUMB AND CONTROL YOUR BRAIN and STEAL YOUR SLACK. Who's behind the Con? The governments. All of them. Who's behind the governments? The HIDEOUSLY DEPRAVED SPACE ALIENS WHO CONTROL THEM! Yes, it's fiction—and then again it's thee MOTHERFUCKING TRUTH. Yes, it's humorous. But if you think it's just a joke, YOU'LL NEVER GET THE PUNCHLINE. Want to know more? Buy the book! Look for "BOB" on the cover:

Since bookstores are controlled by Conspiracy Dupes, the book is probably in the humor section. Humor? Ha! We'll see if you're laughing in 1998 when the Xists arrive and the Ghost Nazis from the Hollow Earth disgorge to TRANSMOGRIFY THE PLANET, pal! If you want to know who has been stealing your slack and how to get it back, get the book or send a measly buck to:

P.O. Box 140306
Dallas, Texas 75214

Tell 'em the Reverend Shirley saved your butt.

Marc Laidlaw's *Dad's Nuke* is a novel about the Johnson Family. The Johnson Family live in a perfectly normal tract home in 1998; like other perfectly normal tract homes, they have a complex electronic intruder-destruction system, an imaginatively lethal retaliatory weapons system—including intermediate range missiles—and a nuclear reactor in the garage. Johnson's son PJ is genetically programmed for homosexuality. Johnson's wife and doctor are fucked up in their own hilarious ways. The neighbors across the street are conspiring against Johnson for petty, byzantine reasons—and beyond the walls that surround this typical suburban neighborhood's high security enclave, the world festers with high-tech decadence and anomie—drowned perversity.

Marc Laidlaw has constructed a delicious satire of scrupulous prose and unscrupulous wit. He's extrapolated the franchised, cable-fed, mall-stamped hell we're building for ourselves into its next logical step, wildly exaggerating where he pleases with stunning effect. This book is badly distributed, but find it and read it and recommend it because *Dad's Nuke* deserves to survive and flourish. Laidlaw may be SF's most Swiftian talent, and certainly one of the field's most versatile.

Waiting for the End of the World by Madison Smartt Bell (Penguin) is another, less humorous hit on the bound-up contemporary condition. Its hero is the fanatically individualistic Clarence Larkin, who has located a profound solitude in the midst of New York City's millions. Larkin lives by photographing deformities for textbooks; he survives his daily perception of the rotting beast the world has become—the city as a stinking beached whale—by sliding into mystical visions. In time, Clarence rescues a child who's escaped from a diabolist father, a child with a pentagram carved by his own father into his flesh. Clarence finds in the mute child a doorway back to his own humanity. Bell's prose is immaculate, studded with dark gems, pared back but intense, and utterly accurate. His characterizations of Satanists, terrorists and gutter drunks ring terrifyingly true. His calm evocation of such phenomena as devil worship and spontaneous human combustion have a deft, understated power that for my money makes them far more believable than anything found in a Stephen King novel. Here is a writer who plumbs the depths of the human condition with a vibrant, piercing light. Weirdly pleasurable to read: I commend this book and this writer to anyone who believes that literature is also music.

Back within the walls of the "high security enclave" we call genre SF, we find a genre fantasy (i.e., "High" fantasy) that transcends its limitations just as its hero eventually transcends earthly bounds. R.A. MacAvoy's *Damiano* trilogy (Bantam) is a woefully under-rated mystical adventure into the grit and wild grandeur of the Middle Ages. The gentle warlock Damiano Delstrego undertakes a quest across a marvelously well-evoked medieval Italy and France, accompanied by his lute-teacher, the Archangel Raphael, and the most charming talking dog who ever lived in fiction or film. Not for MacAvoy are the well-worn habiliments of the heinous practitioners of cute elves and unicorns and paternalistic sages—there are no fantasy clichès here, nor will you find them in her *Tea with the Black Dragon* or *Twisting the Rope* or *The Book of Kells*. Here are real characters, who feel with depth and meaning; here are insights into the existential struggle, as well as entertaining forays into metaphysics and magic. Here, too, is the Black Plague, fleas in the inn straw, telling portraits of dunderhead feudalism, and other adjuncts to the Middle Ages that soppy medievalists like the Society for Creative Anachronisms would do well to remember. This is an honest Middle Ages, despite its supernatural trimming. Damiano's allegorical journey, peregrinating across *Damiano*, *Damiano's Lute*, and *Raphael*, is never dull, never silly, and always memorable. I don't easily fall for fantasies. This one caught me and moved me.

Those of you who haven't discovered MacAvoy will find surprise and delight in virtually everything she writes.

Something else I don't easily go for are hard-science interplanetary novels. It's not that I have anything against them, it's just that the rational half of my brain is about the size of a walnut (the irrational side, thank you, is a well-developed coconut. I use the nut imagery as a gift to my detractors). John Barnes' *The Man Who Pulled Down the Sky* (Congdon & Weed) is so believable and ballsy, I was compelled to put aside my "this is like Math class" dislike for the subgenre, and I dug right in. Barnes is a sort of young, hip Heinlein, who's tale of warring space colonies—the Confederation versus the Orbital Republics—has as much sociological content as hard-SF extrapolation. Barnes is thinking about

Starting the year with a bang

The 1988 Spectra list is the most exciting science fiction and fantasy list Bantam has ever published (he said modestly). And the first four months get it off to quite a start.

JANUARY: Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman write incredible epic fantasy sagas. I mean, you could *live* in their *Dragonlance Legends* trilogy. Well, now they're publishing with us and their new novel, ***Forging the Darksword*** begins their *Darksword Trilogy* in grand fashion. Lots of people had wonderful things to say about George Alec Effinger's ***When Gravity Fails*** when it was published in hardcover. It's now available in paperback and if you haven't read it yet, you're in for a real treat. Speaking of treats, readers were absolutely amazed that a work as accomplished as Robert Charles Wilson's ***A Hidden Place*** was a first novel. But now his new novel, ***Memory Wire*** is out and they're realizing that his first book just gave a hint at how extraordinary he was going to be (Orson Scott Card called ***Memory Wire*** "a profound and beautiful work of art"). Also out this month is ***The Rebel Dynasty, Volume Two***, two of F.M. Busby's terrific Hulzein novels (***The Alien Debt*** and ***Rebel's Seed***) in one book.

FEBRUARY: Ian MacDonald is a one-of-a-kind writer. His short fiction was so distinctive that it garnered him a nomination for the John W. Campbell Award. His first novel, ***Desolation Road*** is simply brilliant. *Locus* calls it "spectacular," and Philip José Farmer said it was "extraordinary and more than that." Who's to argue? In February, in addition to publishing ***Desolation Road***, we've collected Ian's stories (including some never before in print) in a volume entitled ***Empire Dreams***. The month hardly stops there, though. There's Parke Godwin's gorgeous contemporary fantasy, ***A Truce with Time*** in hardcover. It's touching, poignant and funny. And there's Warren Norwood's first fantasy novel, ***True Jaguar***, which Anne McCaffrey calls "smashing good." And there's the second volume in Roger Zelazny's exciting *Alien Speedway* series, ***Pitfall***, written by Thomas Wylde.

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

problems that Niven and pals haven't touched on. This suspenseful story of a struggle over resources has a kind of timeless quality, a sense of social–allegorical subtext that elevates it above technophilia.

So hey, yo! Check it out.

THE BOOK OF THE SUBGENIUS
McGraw–Hill, 1983, $9.95
ISBN 0–07–062229–9

DAD'S NUKE by Marc Laidlaw
Critic's Choice, 1987, $3.50
ISBN 1–55547–147–1

WAITING FOR THE END OF THE WORLD by Madison Smartt Bell
Penguin, 1986, $6.95
ISBN 0–14–009330–3

THE MAN WHO PULLED DOWN THE SKY by John Barnes
Congdon & Weed, 1987, $15.95
ISBN 0–86553–185–4

DAMIANO by R.A. MacAvoy
Bantam, 1983, $2.95
ISBN 0–553–25347–6

DAMIANO'S LUTE by R.A. MacAvoy
Bantam, 1984, $2.95
ISBN 0–553–25977–6

RAPHAEL by R.A. MacAvoy
Bantam, 1984, $2.95
ISBN 0–553–25978–4

John Shirley has three novels out this season. A portion of one of them can be found elsewhere in this issue.

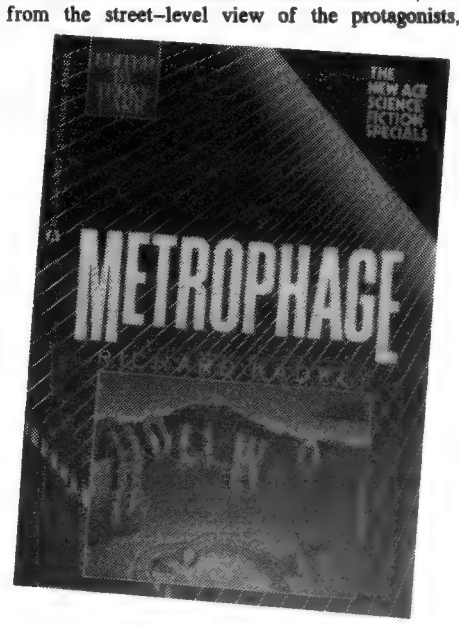
METROPHAGE by Richard Kadrey
Ace, February 1987, $2.95
ISBN 0–441–52813–9

Reviewed by Rafael Sa'adah

Richard Kadrey's 21st Century Los Angeles is a battleground of forces seeking control of the city. Rapacious drug lords govern the importation of medicine and pharmaceuticals. The police force is corrupt and ineffective. Anarchist gangs preach revolution. The brutal paramilitary "Committee for Public Health" regulates the drug trade and rules the streets. And over all looms an alien invasion of the moon which may or may not be a government hoax.

Jonny Qabbala is a quick–witted hustler who floats between these forces, committed to nothing but his own survival. When a new plague virus sweeps LA, Jonny is forced to make choices that will influence the survival of the entire city, as wells as who will ultimately control it.

Unlike William Gibson's Sprawl stories, this is a cyberpunk novel with an urban (rather than global) perspective. The multinational corporations that control Gibson's world exist here, but from the street–level view of the protagonists,



they are not a dominating force. The cyberpunk futures this novel most clearly calls to mind are Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg* and William Burrough's *Bladerunner* (not to be confused with the film of the same name)––the latter for its depiction of medicine as a covert activity in a future society. In *Metrophage*, bands of anarchist "croakers" operate underground clinics which are for many the only access to health care. They are the front line in the fight against the plague virus.

Kadrey's first novel boils over with bright ideas. The medical and technological surface is dazzling. Kadrey's prose is both passionate and clear. The writer's cultural interests infuse this work, popping up at odd times. At times this gets a little silly, with down and out street characters batting about Zen terminology, or the anarchist gang leader waxing poetic about the Surrealists as the ultimate revolutionaries. At other times, however, (as in a walk down a whorehouse corridor filled with grotesque graft jobs) the surrealist influence creates images that are powerful and unsettling.

One weakness in the book is the reliance on the old private eye convention of having the hero periodically knocked unconscious, then awakening in unfamiliar surroundings in order to move the plot along. During the course of events, Jonny Qabbala gets shot, beaten, has his face sliced, is attacked by razor–toothed scavengers, pelted with debris from the rooftops, beaten again, is in a car crash, is stuck with a neural scrambler, is beaten yet again, tortured with electronic whips, gassed with carbon dioxide foam, has his optic nerves burned out in another car crash, and is clawed by a robot tiger whose electronic eyes wind up being implanted in Jonny's sockets. Yet, like Wile E. Coyote, he emerges at the book's end relatively unscathed.

This cartoonish aspect aside, the personal journey that Qabbala makes is plausible and involving. By finding out what he does care about in the world and learning where to take action, his character grows believably––making *Metrophage* more than just a slick read. Richard Kadrey is a writer to watch.

Heavy axle expert Rafael Sa'adah once again turns his attention from the road to prose.

MARCH: F.M. Busby's been writing power-packed sf novels for years (***Rissa Kerguelen, Star Rebel, Rebel's Seed*** and ***The Demu Trilogy***, to name a few). In March, he really stretches out with his most ambitious work to date, ***The Breeds of Man***. It's a knockout story about humanity's next step on the evolutionary ladder which Janet Morris calls "a major accomplishment by a writer of real ability." March also marks the publication of the second volume in Jonathan Wylie's *Servants of Ark* fantasy trilogy, ***The Center of the Circle***. Responses to the first volume in this series, ***The First Named*** (which we published in November) have been uniformly enthusiastic. We also have Richard Bowker's cunning novel of psychic detection, ***Marlborough Street***, and two Elizabeth Scarborough humorous fantasies (***Bronwyn's Bane*** and ***The Christening Quest***) in one volume, which we call ***Songs from the Seashell Archives, Volume Two*** (we published Volume One in October).

APRIL: A while back, I called Frederik Pohl's ***Chernobyl*** one of the most important novels of the year. It seems that quite a few people agree with me. Everyone from the *New York Times Book Review* to the *Chicago Sun-Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle* to the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* has said wonderful things about it and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* even said it was "arguably the best Frederik Pohl has ever written." This April, it will be available in paperback and, if you haven't read it yet, you'll have a chance to find out what all the fuss is about. There are also two very strong novels by terrific young writers in April. ***Neon Lotus*** by Mark Laidlaw is a fascinating journey to the roof of the world. And Daniel Keys Moran's ***The Armageddon Blues*** is a truly gripping tale about a woman who travels 700 years to prevent a nuclear disaster. Also this month is the first one-volume publication of three of Robert Silverberg's finest, ***The Masks of Time, Born with the Dead*** and ***Dying Inside.***

There's a lot of great stuff here. And you'll be *amazed* to hear what's coming in the spring. But that's for another letter...

Enjoy,

Publisher, Bantam Spectra Books

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MARCH

APRIL

Watts SCIENCE FICTION

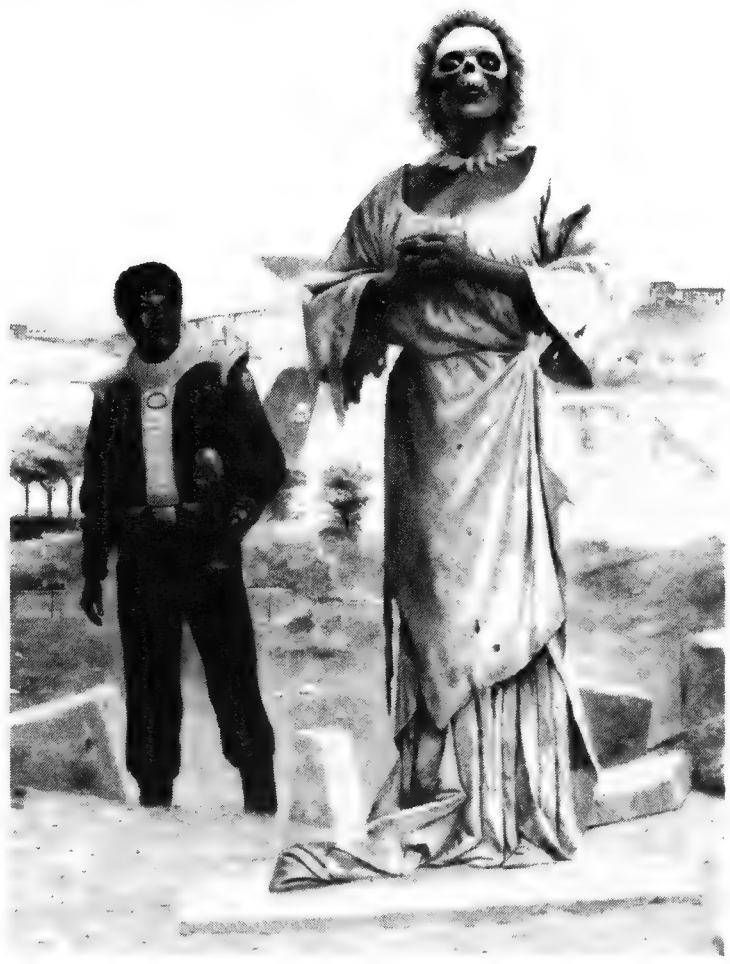
"Imaginative...a lucidly written debut." –*Kirkus Reviews*

WARHAVEN

by M. Elayn Harvey

Rescued from Shaull oppressors on a remote Guardian outpost by the leader Nyyjehnn, Brace the warrior's first allegiance is to the mortal empath who saved his life. But the nonviolent Guardians are no match for the deadly Shaull, and when Nyyjehnn is captured by the Shaull's Amazonian commander-in-chief, Brace must choose between his Guardian friend and the woman, Cintha, who holds the key to his future. **$15.95**

In the country of the dead, life is a dream...



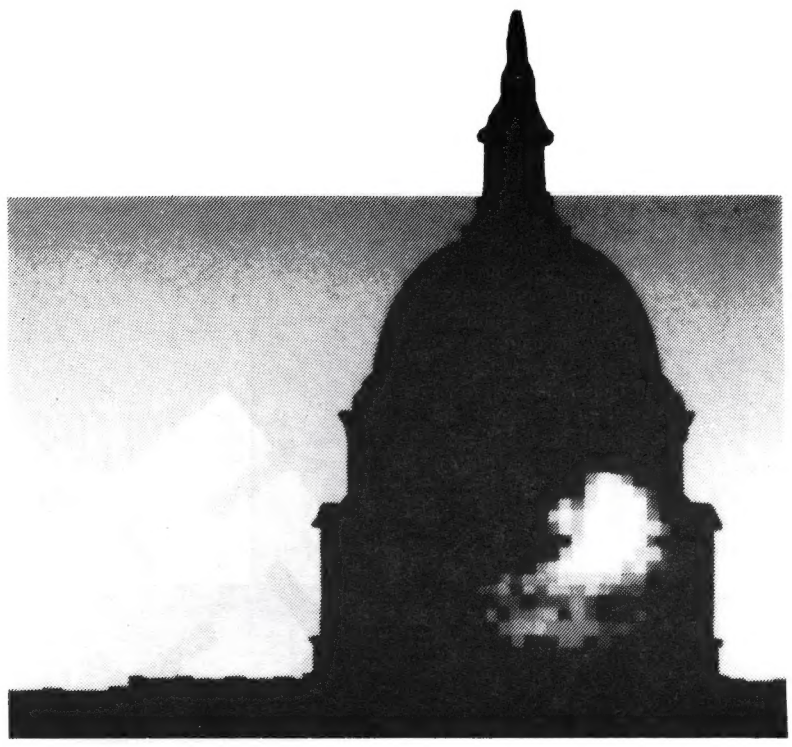
ALQUA DREAMS

by Rachel Pollack

While visiting an alien world in search of a rare mineral essential to intergalactic flight, an Earthman finds a library of crystal books that convey their contents to the reader's mind; a stadium where robots still play to tiers of empty seats; a deserted community cluttered with remains from a vanished civilization; and a primitive tribe who believes that life is a hallucination...and that existence is only a trick played on them by God! **$16.95**

SHOWCASE

"A 'what if' that works. *Budspy* is smart, fast, and mean without ever dipping into hokey or otherwise distracting futurisms."
–Kirkus Reviews



BUDSPY

by David Dvorkin

Forty years after the Nazi victory over America, a young secret agent is sent to Germany to investigate corruption in the U.S. Embassy there. But what he discovers may cost him his life in this terrifying story that combines the speculative qualities of science fiction with the tension of an espionage thriller to ask the shocking question: *What if Germany had won the war?*
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THE YEAR BEFORE YESTERDAY
by Brian Aldiss. Alternate worlds are woven into the everyday life of a man faced with a personal crisis and, as fiction and reality intersect, nothing is exactly as it seems in this novel that ingeniously questions our ideas about how people and science fiction should behave.
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"A fascinating concept, imaginatively delivered."
—Ray Bradbury

THE JEHOVAH CONTRACT
by Victor Korman. "A dying hit man accepts the ultimate contract: the assassination of God...a novel of cosmic—and comic—proportions.
—Library Journal
"I wholeheartedly recommend this Mission Impossible/Philip Marlow/Mike Hammer/John Milton Faith Opera." —Philip Jose Farmer
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"The best science fiction novel ever written."
—The Washington Post

THE STARS MY DESTINATION
by Alfred Bester. "A classic...for whatever reason, *The Stars My Destination* has been unavailable for several years. Now we have it, at last, in hardcover. If you haven't read it, beg, borrow, or even (gasp!) buy a copy. What's it about? For once, I'll simply say read it and find out." *—Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*
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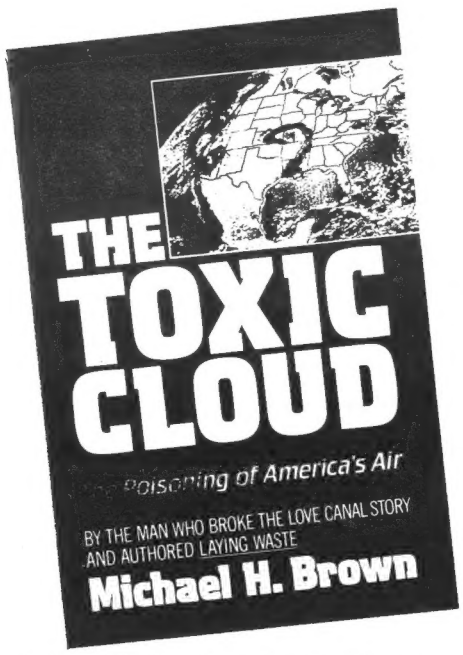


THE TOXIC CLOUD by Michael H. Brown
Harper & Row, 1987, $18.95
ISBN 0-06-015801-8

Reviewed by John Shirley

Suppose you read a science fiction novel in which you learned that atmospheric pollution was much more dangerously extant than anyone dreamed; that toxic waste—including deadly dioxin—is as commonly found in the air we breathe as in isolated dumpsites; that appalling birth defects, a striking increase in cancer, and an epidemic damage to the immune system is coming about as a result; that airborne DDT and other banned chemicals are arriving from other countries on the jet stream and are destroying some of our most beautiful and remote areas and causing hideous deformities in thousands of animals; that atmospheric pollutants are combining in a process known as synergism to create more compounds . . . so that 1,000 pollutants become 10,000 of unknown characteristics?

Would you find all that quite plausible? Would you believe it could come about?

And one more question. Suppose you found out that it wasn't a novel at all. It was nonfiction. It was all quite true and it was happening now . . . In that case, how would you feel?

You'll know when you read Michael H. Brown's new book, *The Toxic Cloud*.

The Toxic Cloud is not fiction, although Dow Chemical, Union Carbide, and other companies might like you to believe it is. Mr. Brown, who wrote *Laying Waste* and broke the Love Canal story, has written an utterly convincing indictment of certain segments of American industry. His book is also an indictment of apathy and shocking laxity on the part of the EPA, epidemiologists, and government. And an American public indulging in a collective case of denial syndrome. He lays bare a cover-up on the part of the chemical industry, and a situation that is not only worse than we've imagined . . . it's desperate.

I am particularly pleased that he's pursuing a line of inquiry that's been on my mind for some time: synergism in toxic airborne compounds. Something that has far, far reaching implications. Something it was stupid of us not to have considered before. Did we really imagine that we could randomly mix thousands of toxins in the atmosphere without their interacting with one another and becoming, quite possibly, something lethal? The EPA controls *only a tiny fraction* of the toxins released into the air—and they control these badly. Many of the worst go entirely unmonitored, let alone controlled.

If Mr. Brown is right, we are in grave danger. I have no space to detail Mr. Brown's proof of his allegations. The evidence is detailed in the book. But I cannot impress on you too vigorously how important this book is. The situation is not one of mere inconvenience to us; it is not a matter of a slight and regrettable increase in the incidence of cancer. It is far worse. If I go on about this, you will dismiss me as an alarmist. Instead, read the book. Mr. Brown is no hysterical alarmist. He is not a paranoid.

I am very much afraid that Mr. Brown is simply right.

THE DAY OF CREATION by J.G. Ballard
Victor Gollancz, Ltd, (UK) 1987, £10.95
ISBN 0-575-04152-8

Reviewed by Richard Kadrey

Imagine the landscape of *Heart of Darkness* transfigured by Dali's "paranoid-critical" method and you'll have some sense of Ballard's new novel, *The Day of Creation*. It is the story of Dr. Mallory and the river he creates—the third Nile he dreams will one day irrigate the whole Sahara. It is also the story of his attempts to destroy the river that bears his name. Ballard plays out Mallory's obsession with the river in a wholly believable northern Africa straight out of today's hackneyed headlines, and shows that though it was Mallory who dreamed the river into existence, he can't keep others from imposing their own dreams on his creation: a seductive young girl who helps Mallory in his pursuit of the river's source, but who might be out to destroy him; an ambitious police commander with dreams of leading a secessionist government; a media-fixated guerilla commander; and a band of widows who travel in their floating bordello plotting an end to war and the male sex at the same time. Alternating images of the river's edenic beauty with the cheap video clichès supplied by a film-maker who dreams of using Mallory's obsession with the river to save his own dying career, Ballard constructs a world that is at once as tenuous as a dream and as real as an infected insect bite.

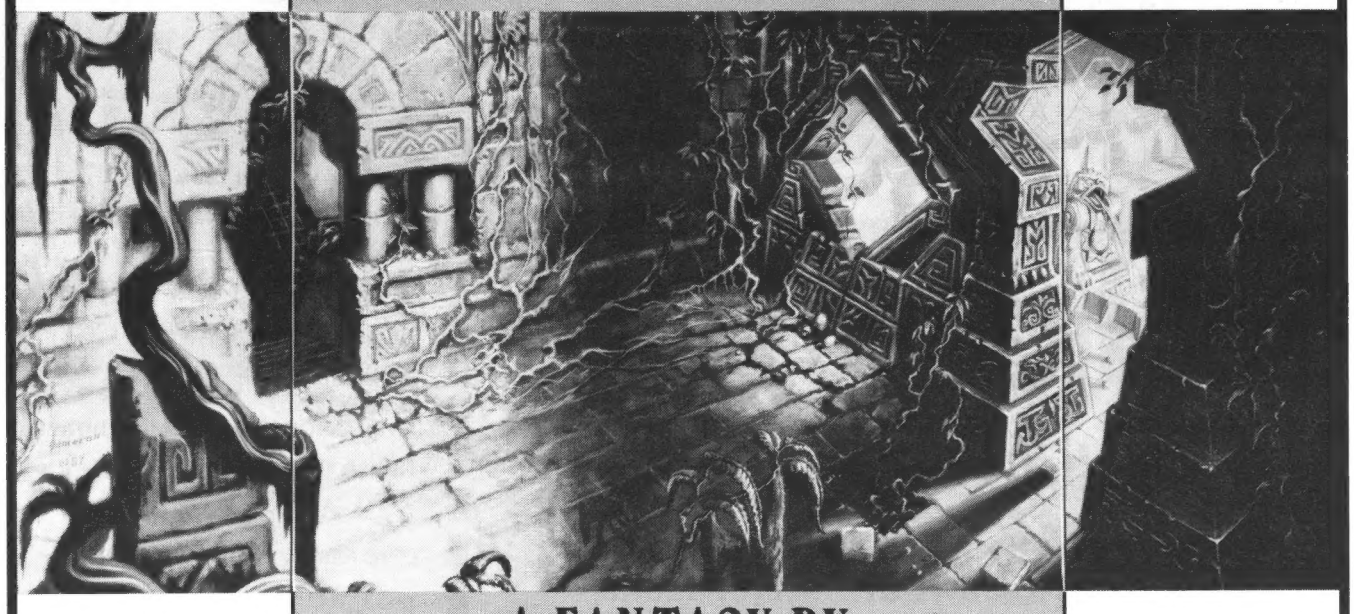
Richard Kadrey lives in San Francisco, and constantly worries whether he ought to surf or die.

"The most interesting author of science fiction writing in English today."—*The New York Times Book Review*

The bestselling author of *Dhalgren* continues the acclaimed Neveryon saga with this new novel of passion and politics, dreams and dragons in a richly imagined barbarian world. Here is a master of the genre at the peak of his powers!

"One of the most important SF writers of the present generation...a fascinating writer who has invented a new style."
—Umberto Eco, author of *The Name of the Rose*

THE BRIDGE OF LOST DESIRE



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RUBICON BEACH
"This book is...a warning to those who lack the courage to cross the Rubicon of their imagination."
—Paul Auster, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW
VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES

RUBICON BEACH by Steve Erickson
Vintage, 1986, $6.95,
ISBN 0-394-75513-8

Reviewed by Liz Hand

In a forward note to his 1957 novel *Balthazar*, Lawrence Durrell wrote:

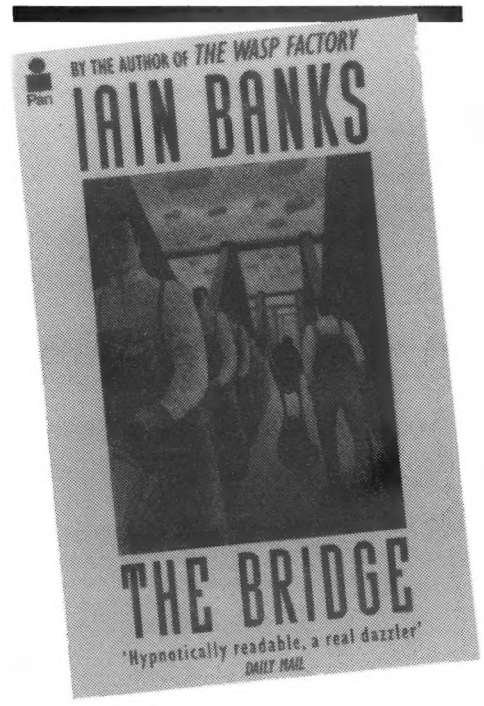
> . . . it would be worth trying an experiment to see if we cannot discover a morphological form one might appropriately call "classical"—for our time. Even if the result proved to be a "science-fiction" in the true sense.

Thirty years later enough "mainstream" writers are attempting such experiments that they seemed to have carved their own little niche (file under Magic Realism) betwixt brightly colored yuppieback originals and the more staid boutique fiction of such worthies as John Updike, Laurie Colwin and Anne Beattie. It may be difficult to pass off Steve Erickson's *Rubicon Beach* as just another y-back, if for no other reason than that it originally appeared in hardcover in 1986. It's also difficult for me to work up any real enthusiasm for this book. Erickson writes beautiful prose, and the opening chapters are promising, limning a dreamy future Los Angeles where earthquakes have destroyed much of the city proper and the sea booms beneath the gutted buildings that still stand. But Erickson's efforts at maintaining a fluid, dreamlike structure for this tale crumble once he embarks upon his second narrative. I found these sections, set in yet another Unnamed Fantastical Central/South American Country Where Magic Still Works (natch), banal, embarrassingly badly written, and dull, not necessarily in that order. We pick up the novel's third narrative somewhere near (contemporary) LA, but by now I've gone back to the blurbs on the inside cover to read

> Part science fiction, part surrealist love story, part political fable . . . (NYT)

and realize: I had been warned. I can't think of a single novel composed of part science fiction, part surrealist love story, and part political fable, that I've ever enjoyed (caveat emptor—Science Fiction: Ask For It By Name). And I'm tired of hacking my way through the jungle of ill-written stories set in that ersatz "other America." To paraphrase the live Elvis, I wish that South America was going out of style.

To Erickson's credit, He's also tried to invoke another (North) America. These two Americas, literal and symbolic, haunt his protagonists, the freed political prisoner Cale and the young witch Catherine. The novel moves freely between the two characters and the two countries (like Britain and Logres), but the whole is less than its parts. Ultimately, *Rubicon Beach* fails. Like the glittering facades that line the novel's city streets, it stands an ornately beautiful work, but hollow.



THE BRIDGE by Iain Banks
British paperback, further data unknown

Reviewed by Liz Hand

If Holden Caulfield had narrated *Lord of the Flies* from Bedlam, it might have sounded something like Iain Banks' first novel, *The Wasp Factory*, a Grand Guignol complete with ax-wielding lunatic, drunken dwarf teenager and the narrator's own Secret Too Terrible to Mention. A fun read, if a little too intent on showering the reader with examples of common household adolescent perversions. His second work, *Walking on Glass*, is more ambitious but less satisfactory. Alternating narratives shift from a love story set in contemporary Britain to the sad misadventures of a slow-witted construction worker to a fantasy featuring a vast twilit castle wherein an aging couple play an endless series of games. The compelling and perverse love story outshines the construction worker's narrative and the derivative (though intriguing) fantasy. But Banks' talent is indisputable, and his third novel, *The Bridge*, is a wonderful book. Its structure echoes that of *Walking on Glass:* one narrative charts a love affair from the Sixties to the present, with one romantic partner comatose following a car accident. Another account follows a sword-wielding barbarian as he batters his way through several fairy tale escapades—told in a stream-of-consciousness highland dialect that's pretty heavy going, but pays off with some laugh-out-loud funny scenes. And then there's the story of John Orr, a patient (or prisoner) on the Bridge, the seemingly endless structure spanning a vast Firth between the legendary City and Kingdom. Orr's psychiatric treatment under Dr. Joyce, and his affair with a mysterious, androgynous woman form the main thread of the book, which leaps from the Bridge's retro-victorian wonders to the tenderly prosaic contemporary affair spinning itself out by another firth (is it another firth?) with another woman (is she another woman?).

The Bridge recalls any number of other works: the barbarian's pun-riddled dialect reminiscent of *Riddley Walker;* the dizzying Bridge itself an edifice inspired by *Gormenghast* and Borges and Kafka's *The Castle* and Moorcock's *Gloriana*. Not to mention a framing plot drawn from *Finnegan's Wake*. Banks plays with the relations between art and life, conscious and unconscious, and the events and ideas that span them. No book this ambitious can be without flaws: Orr's later adventures on the Bridge are not as strong as the earlier sections. The present-day yuppie love story gets a little treacly, with Banks archly noting the passage of years by using the titles of rock and roll albums. But these are trivial points: the good news is that *The Bridge* is one of the best novels of the year.

The bad news is that it's not available in the States. Only *The Wasp Factory* is published here as a mass market paperback; and *Walking on Glass* is out of print in hardcover (no paperback was ever issued here). The critical and popular acclaim for Banks' works in the UK may result in better US distribution of his novels (he has two post-*Bridge* novels: a huge space opera, *Consider, Phlebas*—soon to be a Tor hardback here—and a new rock and roll novel, *Espedair Street*, just published in the UK). In the meantime, if you can find a copy of *The Bridge*, read it and lend it to some deserving friends.

Liz Hand is a new writer with tremendous potential. Until she gets too famous, we've got her.

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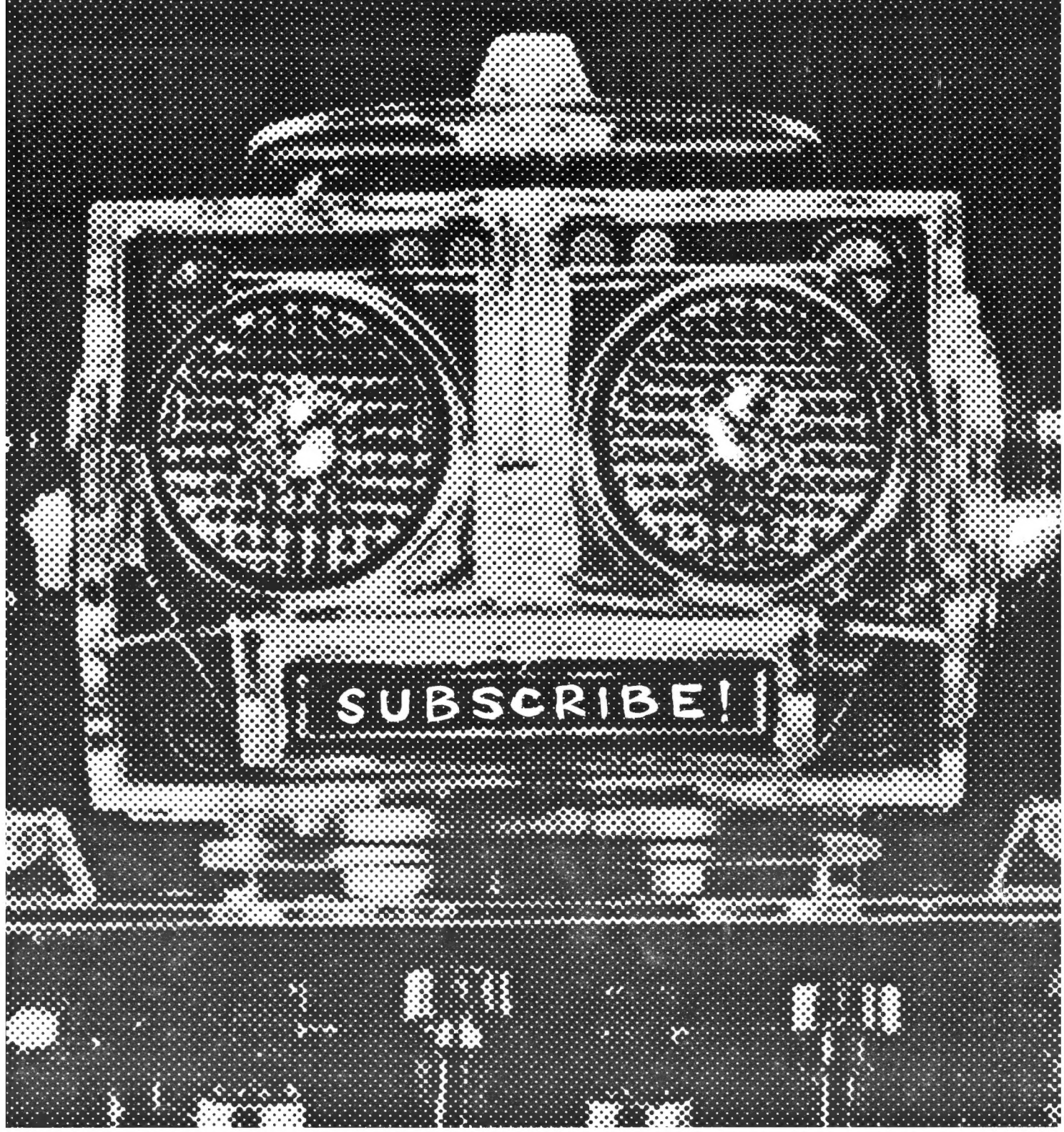

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